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# A PROPHEAT AT HOME

*By the same author*

INSANITY FAIR  
DISGRACE ABOUNDING  
NEMESIS?

A  
PROPHET AT  
HOME

*by*

DOUGLAS REED



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# A PROPHECY AT HOME



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

WHEN I had written two-thirds of this book I decided to call it 'The Decline *To* Fall of the British Empire', as I felt by that time able, with grateful glee, to bury the foreboding which led me to say, in its predecessor, *Disgrace Abounding*, that, by all the portents of that disastrous time, the title of the third book would have to be 'The Decline And Fall Of the British Empire'.

My publisher, however, tells me that the title, 'Decline *To* Fall', would certainly be misunderstood and would lead to confusion, and as I always bow to his excellent judgment in such things the cover and the title-page of the book bear the title, *A Prophet At Home*. For me, nevertheless, the book remains 'The Decline *To* Fall', as I feel that this best expresses my mind, and the reader will find several passages which allude to this title. I owe him this explanation.

## CURTAIN RAISER

October 1939

THIS book is the third — and the last, as I vow with as much sincerity as any man making his good resolutions on New Year's Eve — to grow out of an idea which was to have been contained in one, *Insanity Fair*.

The trilogy, the triptych, the three-master and the three-decker have all passed out of fashion; here, belatedly, is a three-volume-book sprung from a single seed, a fleur-de-lis that grew its second and third petals as an afterthought. When the first and second books were published, events promptly supplied enthralling sequels to them, so that the perspiring writer was left muttering, like Oscar Wilde, 'I wish I had said that', while his second self, who knows him very well, answered, like Whistler, 'You will, Reed, you will'. The saddest of all things of tongue or pen are those you might have said, the retort you might have made if the waiter had not spilt the soup down your neck just as it sprang to your lips, and these last words of mine, famous or infamous, always seethe in me and make me feel like a champagne bottle bursting to expel its cork, or a retired actress pining for her last farewell appearance, which, like to-morrow, never comes.

The story of these three books is, to me, very interesting, like many other things about me. They belong to the more notable of the minor literary failures of our time. The first, *Insanity Fair*, was conceived in 1935, written in 1936 and 1937 and published in 1938. It was the product of an irresistible impulse to warn the British public that it was about to be struck down by the thing which somebody at some time has probably called the juggernaut of war.

About 5000 other writers and politicians at that time were writing and saying the same thing; 5000 more were writing and saying precisely the opposite. I felt that, amid this tumult of voices crying their wares, I would need to wrap mine in some new kind of tinfoil if I were to catch the British eye; indeed, at that

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time literary critics, in some exasperation, were tending to begin their reviews of any book on this boring subject with the words 'Yet another of these books about Europe', as who should say, 'Tragic is the state of literature when men write only of such things as life and death, of liberty and hope, of freemen and bondmen, of war and peace, of poverty and moneybags, when they could write about sweeties and cuties and debutantes and debentures and cricket and croquet and cocktails and cockshies and the clubs and the pubs and who-did-the-murder and all the other fascinating things that make life worth writing about'.

So I had to strike a note that might catch the British ear amid the din, and sought to do this by setting my warning against a background of personal adventure, by weaving into the story a great deal about that absorbing subject, the study of myself.

The method succeeded, in one way. The book *did* attract the attention I wanted. But the effect was different from that which I meant to achieve. The British public, in large numbers, read the book, decided that it was 'readable', cast a sidelong and suspicious but curious glance at its author, and imperturbably continued on its way, caring no more then than before for the juggernaut bearing down on it from behind. The book, as something to read, had succeeded; the warning it contained might as well not have been uttered, and was by many thought to be the expression of an exaggerated pessimism that spoiled an otherwise 'readable' piece of writing, a bad patch in a good story.

The juggernaut was by now very near and I decided to yell 'Look out!' even louder than before. Or rather, I did not decide this, but just followed my inner instinct, and yelled. Time still remained, I felt, for that incorrigible jay-walker to jump out of the way, if only he would. I was no selfless altruist; he had in his pocket my own life, my career, my earnings, my hopes, my future, my children's future, and my ideals. So I wrote another book, *Disgrace Abounding*, and the jay-walker had hardly had time to turn the last page and declare that it, too, was 'readable', but its author an intolerably gloomy fellow, when the juggernaut hit him in the back.

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So these two books failed. But then the strange thing happened. The jay-walker, mangled but still breathing, looked up with reluctant respect and said, 'Sir, you are a successful man. You said this thing would run me down and by Buddha it has. Your books are most readable'. To which I answered, 'Sir, the thing I regret is that all this has hurt me more than it has hurt you'.

But as I contemplated them, the jay-walker and the juggernaut, a project was born in me — to write another book. My typewriter looked at me reproachfully, but I ignored its glance and forced a sheet of paper into its reluctant maw. I had written two books about the juggernaut; now I would write one about the jay-walker, another cautionary tale about his horrid lot, his hopes of recovery, and his chances, if ever he stood on his feet again, of heading straight for the next precipice and casting himself over it, as by all past experience he was bound to do.

I did not want him to do that, but if he did, and if by any chance a spark of life remained in him after that, I wanted him feebly to call to me, as he lay groaning 'twixt life and death, 'Sir, you continue to be successful. You told me I should hurt myself if I threw myself over this precipice and by Mahomet I have hurt myself. I regret that I had with me your last remaining cash, and that this has been lost in the fall, but your books, if I never breathe another word, are beyond dispute readable. You are indeed the model of a successful man'.

Thus, out of a single book came forth twins, and out of those twins, triplets. 'Decline to Fall' is the brother of those others. It is still the product of that flaming, overpowering feeling, born in Berlin and Vienna about the time of Hitler's coming, that there is something rotten in the state of England, which had the strength and power to prevent this, if such plagues of war and death, famine and destruction, can be twice let loose on Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. Other motives have since then come to join that one. For one thing, people in many countries like to read these books, and write to ask me to continue writing them. For another thing, I like to write them.

Before I begin to tell the tale of a homeless patriot, I owe a bow

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and a special word, first, to Scottish, and second to English readers.

Being of a mild and placatory disposition I never, well hardly ever, offer affront without cause, and I do not like to think that Scottish readers may, in this book as in the others, be pained by finding references to 'the English Channel' or suchlike. To some extent I share their feeling, that this is an archaic form, like *Ye Olde this-and-that*, which has no claim to survival, and when I hear politicians to-day foretelling that our salvation after this war can only come through the union of 'English-speaking peoples', I wonder where they, who like myself are probably students of our stage, press, radio and literature, propose to find these English-speaking peoples.

Nevertheless, I fear I may offend Scottish readers in this book again. The trouble began with *Insanity Fair*, in which I severely criticized 'England' and 'English policy' because I thought these were leading straight to a war that could be prevented. The book brought me plaintive plaudits from Scotland, letters in which I was praised with faint damns for always criticizing 'England' and 'English policy'. Be British, urged the writers, and include us in this.

In the next book, *Disgrace Abounding*, I became violently critical of 'England' and 'English policy' because time to avert the war was shortening. This time Mrs. MacGalashiels, of Cromarty Terrace, Inverlochness, and many others, were really cross. They sharply reminded me that Scotland was just as much responsible as, if not more responsible than England for everything that was going wrong, and said plainly that I laboured under an age-old Sassenach delusion if I thought England could make mistakes in a big way without Scottish help. Had I no notion of the part great Scotsmen had played in helping England to bring about all these disasters, they implicitly asked? 'Britain' and 'British' were the words I should use. (I sometimes tried to placate these good Scots friends by addressing my replies to their letters, 'Mrs. MacGalashiels, Cromarty Terrace, Inverlochness, Britain'; but strangely, this seemed to soothe them not at all.)

Of course I know of those Scotsmen, and could name many

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names, if I would, and these letters almost made me resolve to include the Scots next time I had anything really nasty to say, so that they should not again feel slighted. But I feel limits should be set. Would the Scots wish the Germans to re-name rickets, which, as I believe, they call *die englische Krankheit* (the English ailment), or the French to broaden into *britannique* their description of an article said to be in daily use to which we, for some reason, ascribe French origin?

Apart from that, 'English' was what I meant and mean. First, I am English and feel justified, first, in criticizing my own people. And last, the faults and mistakes I scarified seemed to me specifically 'English', and the product of a system specifically 'English'. London, the English capital, is the centre of Britain and the Empire, the seat of the Government which in the end has the decisive word to say in British affairs, and of its parliament. The rulers of Britain, in the Government and in the equally important civil services, are in the vast majority men bred and trained at a few 'public' schools, reserved to a small moneyed coterie, most of which are situated within a long stonethrow of London. 'Foreign policy' is made in London and England. In England, more than in any other part of the Empire, dislike of exertion, fear of change, and rigid class distinctions reach their greatest ponderousness and this dead weight of a system now as far behind the times as Puffing Billy acts as a drag and brake on the younger, healthier and more vigorous forces which would have reinvigorated England, strengthened Britain, and prevented this war.

So 'England' and 'English policy' it will have to be, though I do confess to one inexcusably insular slip in a former book — when I said that 'G.B.' on the number-plate of a motor car stood for 'England'.

And now for the special word to English readers, to the compatriots of the homeless patriot. In one of those books of mine — I often wish that people would not buy my books, but just send me the money for them, this would do quite as well — I spoke casually with some regret of one of those English faults, the lack of a sense of humour.

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Little did I anticipate how many dovescots I should flutter by this simple statement of what seemed to me the most self-evident truth. For the first time I succeeded, beyond all belief, in rousing people. Warnings of war — no, these had not moved the jay-walker, with the juggernaut behind him, who had gone calmly on his way, with the same half-curious, half-pitying, I-know-better-than-you-me-lad look on his face. Not even war itself went deeper than skin-deep.

But with these few words I seem to have set idols atotter all over England. Letters implored me to retract. Acquaintances took me into corners and, after a propitiatory glass of sherry, said, as if by chance but with a deep underlying fear that could not be hidden, 'Of course, you were only joking when you said that we haven't a sense of humour?' Luncheon-table ladies, looking nervously round the table in a perceptible appeal for the support and succour of the assembled company, tittered, with a ghastly attempt to invest the terror they obviously felt in the clothes of a dazzling witticism, 'Mr. Reed is the man who thinks we have no sense of humour, tee-hee!'

I am not easily surprised, but I was startled by the effect these few words had had. To many countrymen and countrywomen of the homeless patriot they seemed to have given a glimpse into some unknown and terrifying world; it was as if, sleep-walking, they had wakened to find themselves on the brink of an abyss, or as if they had found themselves suddenly stripped naked. Take from us what you will, they seemed to say, with pleading eyes, take fortune, hope, even life itself; but do not deprive us of our belief that we have A Sense Of Humour.

Yet these words were seriously written and seriously meant. I believed that, by and large, England and the English lack a sense of humour. Otherwise, how could they live without a single humorous journal, or suffer the heavy bludgeonings of facetiousness they receive from 'light leaders'? How could they continue to laugh, for decades and centuries, at the lampooning of char-ladies and plumbers' mates, of people who drop their aitches or keep aspidistras?

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Does a sense of humour mean that the blue-behind baboon should only be moved to mirth by contemplation of its own nether end, reflected in a pool? How, I thought, could a people have a sense of humour that had allowed its highest Public Attorney to pillory Whistler in the witness-box because he had 'only taken two days' to paint a picture and for this 'labour of two days, asked a fee of two hundred guineas'? And again, what people with a sense of humour could cling to the depressing rite of the white-shirt-and-white-tie so that sometimes in the Bay of Biscay, as somebody once remarked, 'Every first class passenger put on evening clothes to be sick in'?

But the English Sense Of Humour, as I had noticed, only found class distinctions funny when contemplated, in those below, by those on top; when considered, in those on top by those below, they were sacrosanct. No plumber's mate, charlady, aitch-dropper or aspidistra-keeper was expected to find anything funny in the white-tie gag, which I find excruciating; this would have been class-hatred.

That form of minor mental derangement which is known as dressing-for-dinner took one of its funnier turns, as I think, with the coming of radio, when the joint owner of the voice that reads the news, the cough, and the phrase 'Excuse me, I'll read that again', was required to appear in evening clothes before the tiny mechanical box through which his words, cough and apology travelled to the public, and was authorized to claim a small sum each week for the laundering of the starched shirts he thus needed.

Invisible to all but himself, he stood there, clothed in the same uniform as every waiter in the land and as every bandsman, crooner, and fashionable comedian, for, as one of these, himself most immaculately attired, once most truly sang, the world that tries so hard to amuse itself demands that even its bawdy ballads should be sung to it by a man wearing such clothes:

Give them smut, and give them dirt  
In a clean white tie and a clean white shirt!

That invisible man at the microphone, in his dinner-jacket,



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seems to me symbolic of many things in England, but among these things is not a sense of humour.

Every rule has its exceptions, and England has, of course, here and there, men and women with a sense of humour. One of these got loose during the present war and was promptly suppressed; he escaped with a fine, and was lucky not to have gone to prison. This was the man, and in my opinion he deserves to count among the gayest jesters in history, who was bombed in his house in Jermyn Street and, on climbing into the next door house to see the damage, found, in his own words, 'an unexploded bomb standing up on the floor like a beer bottle'.

His subsequent actions, in my view, are those of a man with A Sense Of Humour, but then, as I say, he was fined. The bomb had not exploded, but might explode at any time. In the general interest, therefore, its removal to a place where it could explode harmlessly was advisable, and this man picked it up and started downstairs with it. It weighed 100 lb., and on the way he dropped it on his foot. At the foot of the stairs he met a friend and said, 'Look, I've got a bomb. How can we get it to the Green Park?' The friend said, 'Wait here and I'll fetch a taxi, and we'll take it and give it breakfast at the Corner House'.

This seems to me a very humorous proceeding, and I only regret that before the friend came back the man with the bomb had been arrested, because I should love to know if London contains a taxi-driver with that particular sense of humour. Unfortunately the official sense of humour dictated that, in the circumstances of this incident, the bomb should have been left where it was until it could be officially removed, and if during the wait it exploded and wrecked a house or two, well, that would just be part of the price that has to be paid for a sense of humour.

The man with the hundred-pound bomb was fined a hundred pounds and granted bail in a hundred pounds; his final remark, when the fine was reduced to one of only five pounds, was that he was 'glad to be out of the hundred pound class'.

This, as I say, was an exceptional man, and he learned that a sense of humour is an expensive thing to have in England.

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But England at large — and how often have I wondered whether England deserves to be at large — most certainly lacks a sense of humour. The proof of this, to my satisfaction at all events, is first that a nation with a sense of humour would not talk so incessantly about its sense of humour; second, that it would not object so vehemently when it is told that it has no sense of humour; and third, and most important, and above all, that no nation with a sense of humour could on three successive days vociferously applaud the same statesman in such contradictory declarations as these:

On Monday:

Freaks, rum'uns, fellow-curiosities, lend me your ears. The great power Athens has treacherously and without warning attacked the weak state of Corinth, which we are pledged to succour. We are resolved to prevent a new era of militarist aggression on this planet and shall aid noble Corinth with all our might, until the barbarous aggressor is defeated.

On Tuesday:

Athens has almost completed the subjugation of Corinth: we feel there is after all much to be said for Athens and it would be midsummer madness to try and preserve so ramshackle a state as Corinth, which is a long way away anyway, and which we know nothing about. We should not hastily forget the long traditional friendship and the close bonds of sympathy which unite us with noble Athens.

On Wednesday:

Barbarous Athens has attacked us. In taking up the sword, which we shall not sheathe until we sheathe it, we are defending the cause of weak states and freemen throughout the world against the forces of evil. History will show etcetera etcetera etcetera. We are fighting for Christianity civilization democracy etcetera etcetera etcetera. . . .

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One aspect of a sense of humour is that a man should be able to laugh at a joke against himself. A Jew, for instance, always enjoys a joke at his own expense, because it costs him nothing.

But the homeless patriot is still looking for the English sense of humour. It was there once. Perhaps we have put it down somewhere and cannot remember where, somewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century. We certainly know we had it, once. Perhaps Sheridan and Hook and Lamb gave it to Wilde and Whistler, and these two, deciding that it belonged to Ireland and America anyway, took it with them. If it is to be found anywhere in England now, then it is in the keeping of the Cockneys, or perhaps of the great working class as a whole; they, it is true, still have a very keen sense of fun.

## WINDOW OVER LONDON

HERE I am, after forty-five years, perched in a crow's nest, on look-out over London. Everywhere I have been I always tried to sit up aloft, like the sweet little cherub. In the town I always sought the highest room I could find, in the country a house on a hill.

My drabbest memories are of basements and ground floors, but the coldest attic, like one I once had in Paris, glows pleasantly in my thoughts, because the sun and the moon and the stars were its neighbours. If I had been a dale-dweller, in some primitive time, I should never have rested until I had come to live on a hill, and those medicine-men of our contemporary times, the surgeons of the mind, who think to discern the instincts and impulses that were being given a man when he lay in his mother's womb, would produce some strangely-named explanation for this, something about fear and phobia; but I think a healthy man, like a plant turning towards the light, is naturally moved to get his head into the clean air and look about him and make for a higher hill, if he sees one.

Here, in this room, I feel that I am on the roof of London. Nothing that I can see is higher than I am, save the barrage balloons, that on a fine day browse above me like silver cows in an azure meadow, and on a dull one loom intermittently through the lower fringe of trailing grey clouds, staring stupidly down at me from between their horns. In this long and lofty room, with its tall windows all around, I feel that I am in a ship, sometimes sailing towards a cloudless blue horizon, sometimes ploughing across the ragged and broken grey sea of London's roof-tops.

Outside, as far as I can see, and that is a long way, is London. Ten or twenty spires, according to the weather. Leagues of roofs and chimneypots.

Outside are shrieking sirens, the fierce bark of anti-aircraft guns, like tethered bloodhounds savagely but vainly straining at some-

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thing just beyond their reach, the drone of engines from unseen aeroplanes, the leaden, quivering crash of bombs.

Two of them fell a little way off last night, as I sat at my window over London, watching spellbound. They fell near the Edgware Road; one, exploding in a great flower of flame and sparks, blossomed into the night like a gold and scarlet chrysanthemum, and the other grew into a tall black tulip of dark and menacing smoke.

To-day I shall see two more heaps of squalid ruins in those mean streets; strange how houses that die a violent death, like human beings, look ridiculous and repugnant, an obscene caricature of their well-tended, best-face-foremost living selves, so that you long to take a cloth and cover them. This, you think, half-pitying and half-contemptuous, was a man, who lived and laughed and loved; is it possible? (How often have I thought that and wished that we could evaporate in the moment of death.) And this, you think, was a house, where men and women mated and children played, this heap of muck with the inexplicably intact bathtub lying askew on top of it; is it possible?

And why is the bathtub seemingly always spared? Would it then be good to undress and take a bath when the bombs begin to fall? Strangely, I always do just the opposite. If I am in my bath, singing, as is the Englishman's bathright, when they come I get out of it and dress; although I have, or think I have, less superstitions, prejudices and inhibitions than most, I share with others this unreasonable resolve to be clothed and in my right mind for any rendezvous with a bomb, although I know better than they that, clothed or unclothed, I should look just as ridiculous afterwards.

London. London, for the first time for centuries, visited by flame and destruction. How those barrage balloons remind me, sometimes, of the Gadarene swine, the heraldic beasts of our time! London in the throes of her greatest ordeal since the Great Fire and the Plague. Courage standing guard in the streets; fear huddling in the basements. My own, my native city; for the first time for many years I feel like that about London, for pity is at

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any rate akin to love. The silhouette I see from my window is still almost unimpaired. The gaps, relative to the gigantic mass of the city, are few and far between; London has only had a few teeth knocked out. But the cup of human misery fills and fills; it must have a hole in the bottom, or it would have overflowed long since.

I cannot myself understand the insuppressible second side of my nature which makes me exult to sit at my window over London and watch and experience the very thing I foresaw and dreaded for so long. For I sat at another high window in Berlin for many years and watched the four horsemen—war, famine, pestilence and death—grooming their steeds for a new adventure; and afterwards I sat at other windows in Vienna and Prague and saw them gallop through the streets; and in Bucharest and Warsaw and Brussels and Paris I heard the drumming of their approaching hooves; and during all those nightmare years I thought and knew and said and wrote, 'The end of all this will be London and England and Britain and the British Empire, and why the heck doesn't my own, my native land throw off its lunatic obsession with golf and the pictures and chocolate creams and cocktail parties and ranting, sanctimonious politicians and stop this while there is time, for peace is more desirable than another war?'

To be run over by a train you never see is not so bad; but I was like a man tied to the track who had to watch the train bearing down on him for miles. I was like a man who called to another, about to be knocked down, 'Look out', only to be rebuked by the cold stare of one who has not been introduced. I was like a man who knew for years the nightmare he would have on a certain night. Yet now, when the nightmare is here, I am glad to be in it.

I suppose there are several reasons. The schoolboy longing for adventure still stirs in me, and the journalist's itch to write about great events, however revolting, too; if I were sent to Hades I should take an asbestos typewriter with me. Then, I have forgotten fear, and this helps; the summer of 1940 suddenly made me realize, for some queer reason, that nothing is wasted in such prodigious quantities as fear, and that to fear for others is as wasteful as to fear for oneself. Then again, the smug years from

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1918 to 1939, when God's name was tagged on by smug old men to every crime against reason and humanity and the cause of mankind, were so bad that the present is not worse; on the contrary, it is better, for now we no longer pretend that we are at peace when we are at war. And lastly, the nightmare has not reached the one final and fatal and irretrievable end — the invasion of England and England's subjugation to a foreign conqueror, which would mean to a man of my mind a death worse than the other death, because it would mean for centuries the end of hope.

England has lain in immunity from this thing for too long; her people have almost forgotten what it means. But I know, for I have lived among peoples who for centuries lay under alien rule, and I have seen other peoples, who had known a brief liberation from that worst of all fates, again surrendered pitilessly to it — in one appalling case at the command of England herself. As long as this irrevocable disaster does not happen, hope remains; and while there's hope, there's life.

But back to London and St. John's Wood, and my window over London. The Gadarene swine are just being hauled down; one gigantic beast sinks slowly past my window, goggling in at me in porcine incomprehension of my contemptuous look, and disappears behind an apartment house to his lair. Now nothing is higher than I, in my crow's nest over London town. Low cloud and mist and driving rain have hidden the spires and all else but the nearer roof-tops, and an unexpected sea-gull, swinging round and round outside, makes me feel more than ever that I am in a ship on a wintry sea. Somewhere above, even in this weather, flies a bomber, for the sirens are shrieking again. Where London was, half an hour before, is only a grey curtain, a backcloth for the thoughts that chase each other through my mind. That sea-gull is back again, majestically steadying himself on some air current known only to the chart of his instinct. I *must* be in a ship. The bomber sounds to be overhead; what weather to fly in! In the last war, when I was in the air force, we would never have thought of leaving the ground on such a day as this, but now, with all these new instruments, they fly in anything.

## WINDOW OVER LONDON

The last war! Against that grey backcloth, from my window over London, I see the figures of my youth's friends, of the men who were young when I was young. Rain, and mist, and driving wind, and mud, and the little khaki figures rising from some unsuspected trough in the mire and going forward, at Ypres, on the Somme, at Passchendaele. There they go, like the ten little nigger boys, and rat-a-tat-tat, and down they go, and soon there are none.

A million of them. I might have been dining with one of them to-night. There they go, against the grey curtain, with little blobs on their heads that are tin hats, and little sticks in their hands that are rifles, one after another they go, and fall, and disappear into the grey mist. They were heroes; they made the world safe for democracy; where are they now? All sorts of phrases we made up about them:

They died that we might live  
Their name liveth for evermore

They shall grow not old as we that  
are left grow old

At the going down of the sun, and in the  
morning, we will remember them

If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies blow. . . .

and we stood round the Cenotaph and round the village war memorial, for a time, but now we don't do that any more, because more candidates are in the making to be remembered at the going down and at the rising of the sun, and the earlier candidates have gone to join Napoleon's ten million forgotten dead and the Boer War dead and all the other dead.

But I remember them, as they pass before me against that grey background, and am sorry for them. I never said, as many people said, that their lives had been ruined by the last war. Mine was not — but then, I survived, and had a good time, and having had it I should not mind sharing their lot to-day, as long as nobody



## WINDOW OVER LONDON

irritated me by telling me I was making the world safe for something, but their lives were quite ruined, because they died, and if they could, if they can, look back now they must wonder why.

I wish they could all have survived, as I did, and have known good times before they went to make the world safe for something — have known the sunshine on Swiss lakes, snow on Austrian mountains, wine-gardens on the Vienna hills, Prague at Christmas time, Budapest in the spring, poverty, fatherhood, success, despair, love, especially love amid the bombs. But they were so young, and what has it all availed? Will this avail anything? Why must the young men, the best, go first, this time again? The military age should begin at fifty and work downwards. Why take the cream of another generation before it has had time to form? Why deliver England to another generation of old men?

The grey curtain that envelops my window over London offers no answers to these questions; only the echo comes back — Why? But looking out from it I am surprised to discern that my life, which like the lives of millions of others in these times seemed continually to be taken up and thrown senselessly here and there by the unmeaning storm of events, has after all a certain rhythm. For I notice, suddenly, that I am still in the middle of the events I have watched for so long. They have swept me back to my home town, even to my birthplace.

*On revient toujours . . .* I have not loved London for long enough, but I have come back to London. Just round the corner, only just out of sight, is the house where I was born; it was nearly bombed the other night. Just round another corner are the barracks from which, when I was a baby in arms, I saw British soldiers march off to make South Africa safe for something or other. Just round a third corner is a place I was married — not the marriage that is in the records, but a romantic affair that was solemnized between the lamp post and the letter-box in Avenue Road, and how well I remember that day. Nearby, too, is Lord's Cricket Ground, Mecca of all my youthful pilgrimages, place where I lay as a British soldier waiting to go to the last Great War.

The grey curtain, and the superior sea-gull, and the thing that

## WINDOW OVER LONDON

just exploded somewhere, suddenly combine to tell me that I am just where I ought to be. They can answer no other questions, but they can at least tell me that. Here I was born; here I am; and here I might die if one of those bombers pulls his lever just at the right moment. But by some manner of means I know that this will not happen. If it should, the most precious part of my English birthright — need I say, my sense of humour — will enable me, looking back from any future existence there may be, to have a good laugh at my own expense; the joke will be on me. But it will not.

And meanwhile, this window over London is the best possible place for me. I am most lucky to have it, and I owe my possession of it to a man called Hitler. For before he began bombing London a dwelling on the roof of London was the most desirable of things, hardly to be had for love or money by any Englishman in London, now the most un-English of towns, and quite unobtainable in those parts which the few remaining natives have come to call St. Johann's Wood, Finchley Strasse and Britisch West Hampstead.

But with the coming of the bombs many of the new British — after the last war we had the miscalled new poor, and after this one we shall have the similarly miscalled new British — have departed, to Cheltenham, Bedford and Harrogate, to basement dwellings and cellars cool. The native Londoner may find air to breathe.

He may even find, as I have, a window over London.



PART ONE

THE PIPING TIMES



## CHAPTER I

### HOMECOMING

IN the spring of 1939 the arms of Tower Bridge opened and folded me, the homing wanderer, to the damp bosom of my mother London. I had been twelve years away, and but for the war that was brewing, I never should have returned, for in those years I had come to think that life was pleasanter in some other countries I had seen, where there was more light, more sun, more music, more wine, even more freedom in the expenditure of a leisure hour, and moreover, these travels had widened my outlook so that the habit of thinking in blinkers, which prevails in this island, put a sore burden on my patience, of which I never had very much.

It was a strange experience for me to compare the man who came down the gangplank from the little Polish steamer, that day in the spring of 1939, and looked about him at his native London, with the man who had gone up the gangplank of another steamer twelve years before and turned his face towards Europe. I remembered the regret, that lingered on for years, like a chronic toothache, with which that other man turned his back on his native land, where he had known nothing but hard times and struggle, and the wary distrust with which he journeyed towards countries he did not know, for, strange to say, this London-bred young man had until that time scarcely ventured outside his London, save for four years spent in Flanders fields, where poppies are said profusely and significantly to grow, and a few months in Paris.

I remembered particularly the clean white faith of that young man, who went up the gangway, in his country, in its leaders, and in the pledges they had made over the graves of a million other young men cradled, like himself, about the turn of the century.

He, and they, were all the children of a dead century in which tyrants, great and small, had progressively had their claws clipped, in which the oppressed, whether communities or individuals, had

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come nearer and nearer to liberty; the Turk had at last been driven from Europe, his subject peoples had begun to free themselves from the yoke of the Germanic Kaiser in Vienna, the last serfs had been freed, the new slaves, those of the machine, were gradually achieving recognition of the dignity of their labour. Then a new tyrant, a new black Teutonic knight, a new despoiler of small and defenceless peoples, had appeared in freedom's ring, been promptly met and challenged and overthrown.

The young man going up the gangplank in 1927, and his millions of comrades in arms, dead and still alive, had had a hand in that. Now the ring was free again. His country, and France, would see that no new tyrants arose in Europe, that the continent should steadily resume and continue its slow but perceptibly upward progress towards a better and juster and more equal order. The price that had been paid was appalling, but every penny piece and every drop of blood that had been paid were worth it. For a man could still believe that his world was slowly improving through the unnumbered centuries, and as long as he could believe that life had joy and meaning; without that, it was a senseless thing that could not be invested with meaning by all the chanting and dirging about some shining paradise to come. Peace on earth and goodwill towards men were the things to labour for, and not all the ranting about some Omar-Khayyam-like hereafter could compensate for war on earth and inhumanity towards men.

But the young man climbing up the gangplank, in 1927, had no doubts on this score. All was moving, slowly but still surely, for the best in the best of all possible worlds, and, as long as he could believe this he was quite prepared to believe that God was in His heaven — for the only God he could believe in was that higher purpose and meaning in life on this planet. But in 1927 life on this planet still seemed to show a pattern and a meaning; suffering and inhumanity were understandable because they had patently begotten good. There was undoubtedly gold in them thar hills. The young man going up the gangplank was quite sure of that.

How different he was, and what different luggage he brought

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with him, when he passed through those open arms in March of 1939! How much he had discarded, how much he had acquired! With what different eyes he looked at his native city and native land! Even his outer man had changed beyond recognition. When he went up the gangplank, as he now recollected with astonishment and dismay, he wore a black soft hat and even carried an umbrella — because other men had worn black soft hats and carried umbrellas. At that time he had not begun to think, to see himself as others saw him; he had been a sheep among other sheep, and a sheep moving north sees nothing but the southern aspect of the sheep before it.

Now he came down the gangplank with a battered, sand-coloured hat on his head, a trophy dear to him, because it had been bought in Prague the day before the petrol-driven hosts of the new tyrant had crashed and rumbled into the city. On his back, weirdest of garments, was an almost azure-blue greatcoat with an enormous fur collar; the fur had been necessary in a bitter Rumanian winter and the azure-blue colour, which ought to have been a discreet greenish grey, was the result of a trick of light in a murky Bucharest furrier's.

I stood on the wet planks of Somebody-or-other's Wharf, that rainy day, and looked back at Tower Bridge, and compared those two men, the man with the black hat and firm faith who had passed under it outward bound so many years before, and the disillusioned man in the astonishing fur coat who had just come home and been folded in those embracing arms. The outer change was great; but the change in his inner man was far greater.

When I came down the gangplank I came home, not for good, but at any rate until after the war. The war had not yet come, but I knew it must come, and soon; and England, the homeless patriot's home, was the only place to be. What else was there to do? My beloved Europe hardly held a corner where a journalist still might write, and, what was worse, I had found that the things he knew would not be published or would not be heeded.

For I had been present at the preparation of a war. In my youth, when the first was being prepared, I had been a London



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clerk, living in a London suburb, Brondesbury, and had neither known nor understood anything of these things. I had simply known, with an instinct born of things I read in the newspapers, that a war with Germany loomed ahead, and the German commercial travellers in the lodging-house next door, with whom I chatted on summer evenings, were as sure of that as was my instinct. It worried me not at all; indeed, I looked forward to it. I did not know why or how that war was being prepared. All the fault, I was sure, lay on the other side. I did not wonder whether it might be prevented — I was too young.

But this time I had seen the inner mechanism of a war under construction, the intrigues of the rich and palsied old men in this country and that which had brought it about, the tricks that had been used to thwart all efforts to prevent it. I had been in all the countries where the separate parts of the machine were made, and watched the men who controlled it. I knew this time, as I had not known before 1914, that the war could have been prevented; I knew, indeed, that more skill and effort had been needed to allow it to happen, through the delusion of the peoples, than would have been needed to hinder it.

I knew, now, that seven years before the 1914 war the permanent head of the British Foreign Office, Sir Eyre Crowe, whose voice should have been heeded, had in black and white precisely foretold the coming of that war — unless the things were done that would avert it. I knew that the British Ambassador in Berlin of that time and the correspondents of *The Times* in Berlin of that time had uttered precisely the same warning and had always given chapter and verse to support it. Nothing had availed and that war had come. That did not worry me: I had rather enjoyed it — but then, I had survived.

But now, coming down the gangplank in 1939, I knew that all this history had exactly repeated itself, just as vainly, and I found this sinister indeed.

I knew that the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Horace Rumbold, seven years before, just after the coming of Hitler in 1933, had in well-measured words given precise warning of the character

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of that new regime in Germany and of the dangers it must lead to. He knew Germany.

I knew that the permanent head of the British Foreign Office of that time, Sir Robert Vansittart, was of exactly the same mind and that his opinions, who also knew Germany, had been set aside in favour of those of men who did not; I knew that he had been promoted downstairs by his appointment as 'Chief Diplomatic Adviser', and that in major crises in our affairs with Germany the counsel of men who did not know Germany had prevailed, for instance, the 'Chief Economic Adviser', Sir Horace Wilson.

I knew that the correspondents of *The Times* in Berlin, of whom I had been one, had given precisely the same warning, also with chapter and verse, for seven years before the coming of this war, with as little avail. I knew that Norman Ebbutt, the Chief correspondent of *The Times* in Berlin when Hitler came to power, wrote in April of that year (1933):

Herr Hitler, in his speeches as Chancellor, has professed a peaceful foreign policy. But this does not prove that the underlying spirit of the new Germany is a peaceful one. Germany is inspired by the determination to recover all it has lost and has little hope of doing so by peaceful means. Influential Germans do not see ten years elapsing before the war they regard as natural or inevitable breaks out in Europe. One may hear five or six years mentioned.

'Five or six years.' That was written in April 1933. The new war came in September 1939. This warning was a masterpiece of careful political forecasting, based on expert knowledge. It was written three months after Hitler came to power; three years before he took the first step which *should* have been answered by war or the threat of it; five years before his first annexation (Austria); from five to six years before his three later adventures, the first two of which (the annexation of the Sudetenland and the invasion of Prague) *should* have led to war, and the third of which (the attack on Poland) *did* lead to open, as distinct from covert, war.

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The forecast I have quoted is especially remarkable for the careful weighing of words — not one too many nor one too few, although this was high-speed daily journalism, not leisurely conjecture written at a spa. It is not even difficult for skilled men, thoroughly steeped in their subject, to achieve such close political forecasts (which are not *prophecies*; there is nothing prophetic about them).

My own view, written and spoken, was exactly the same, and I said the same things at the same time to Members of Parliament and others who came to Berlin. Other British newspapermen in that city foretold the course of events with equal exactitude. Indeed, almost unanimity prevailed. Seldom has the course of events been so simple to foretell and so difficult to misjudge, save by men either deluded or dishonourable. I myself was reminded, after the war began, by a Government official whom I met in a London hotel that at a meeting in Geneva in the spring of 1935, he had asked me whether I thought war was approaching, and that I answered: 'There will certainly be a European war in 1939 or 1940 — if we do not do this-and-that.'

'We did not do this-and-that, and why not?'

The question rankled sorely in my mind as I came down the gangplank. I knew that, in such a case, the joint opinion of three authorities — the permanent Head of the Foreign Office, the Ambassador in Berlin, and *The Times* correspondent in Berlin — could be counted on, especially if they coincided so closely. In small things they certainly would be followed. Why were they discounted, or even suppressed, in so great a matter as a new European war? Why was the public, which received a true report of every stroke in a game of tennis at Wimbledon or of every kick in a cup final at Wembley, why was the public misled and misinformed about such things as the making of a war, so that it doddered uncomplainingly and unsuspectingly along, confident in the assurances of its leaders that peace would prevail in our time, until, suddenly, war came upon it?

For, in those twelve years between going up and coming down the gangway, although I had never found an answer that fully

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satisfied me to the question I have just asked, I had discovered one thing for certain: that it is not true that wars must be and will always be. This one need not have been. It would have been far easier and far cheaper to prevent it than to allow it to come about.

Then, why? Can stupidity, ignorance, age, fear of exertion, the dithering of old men, can these things alone explain it? I hardly think so. There must be some deeper motive, for which I am still seeking, though I often think that I have touched its skirt. One thing is certain. If the war of 1939 was possible, after the experiences of 1914, another war after this one is not possible but probable.

Hatred of the war-makers — in all countries, not in any particular country — seethed in my mind as I came down the gang-plank that day and turned to contemplate my blissfully ignorant self of twelve years before.

The war was at hand, I knew that. I had just come from Poland, where its shadow was already touching the frontier, and before that I had seen the machine at work in Czechoslovakia and Austria. War lay close ahead, black, pestilent, dreary, foul, and inevitable because no man in England had had the courage or energy or inner truthfulness to avert it.

Should I escape to some balmy beach, lie basking at Tahiti or in the Bermudas? I felt half-inclined to fly while there was still time — not from the war, but from this awful apathy and dilatoriness and do-nothingness and we'll-muddle-throughness in my own country to which I had in my own mind given the name of Chamberlainism and the heraldic symbol of an umbrella rampant.

This was the thing which I could not stand, the thing which to me was more horrible than all the horrors of war, and yet was always dressed up in godly words and smug phrases. It was the spirit which led people through the length and breadth of the land, later, when the war came, to placard on their walls a lunatic saying, probably uttered by Queen Victoria at the time of the Crimean War, or some such distant affray: "There is no depression

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in this house, and the possibilities of defeat do not interest us. They do not exist.'

This was the spirit which appalled me, and I would almost sooner have slept with a corpse than have lived with it, the spirit that sees something good and brave and clever in ignoring unpleasant things and pretending that dangers do not exist, as long as one is not personally in peril.

To be bombed or shot was a small thing, but to live in an atmosphere of blundering rich men entirely surrounded by sycophantic applauders was a fate far worse than death, I thought. Yet there was nothing for it. The war was coming to England, soon, and I had to be there, to see what happened. Not the war, but the feeling of hopelessness, born of those seven years of vain and thwarted effort, was the awful thing.

This was the feeling which made me say, when one Noel Coward, whom I had never met, called to see me soon after my homecoming and asked me what I thought of our old friend The Situation, that I thought it a loathsome Situation and would like to go the the South Seas, so that I could be as far as possible from it.

'Oh,' said Noel Coward, a thought shocked, 'but that would be running away!'

I knew, with some regret, on the day I came down the gangplank, that I should not be able to bring myself to run away, even from that infuriating, self-satisfied apathy which had come to inspire me with horror. My journalist's curiosity and my English birth would force me to stay.

Resplendent in my sky-blue coat with the terrific collar, I passed down the gangplank, with some hundreds of Polish Jews who had come to England in the same ship. I looked around me curiously at the land of the jay-walker to whom I had been shouting for so long. Grey skies, grey water, grey roofs, grey streets.

I was home! 'So this is England!' I thought, and I turned to begin my voyage of exploration and discovery.

## CHAPTER 2

### OU L'ON S'ENNUIE

A STRANGE England that I discovered in the spring and summer of 1939, in those few months before the war openly began. An exasperating and incomprehensible land. Even now, when the war had in effect begun, but for the fighting, and that only lacked because none had as yet bestirred themselves to resist the blows that were being given, even now no signs of real awakening offered.

Half the newspapers were still scoffing at the very suggestion that war was possible. Conscription had been jubilantly introduced, true, a few days after the Tory majority, thinking to anticipate the wishes of Mr. Chamberlain, had drafted its solemn vow to die in the last ditch rather than vote for conscription, but the actual preparations for universal military service were proceeding with the speed and in the manner of a county cricket match, with intervals for lunch, tea, and all the rest. (I am not of those who profess to know what history will say about everything, not because I do not know but because I am not interested, history being seemingly an imbecile who never learns anything from past follies, but I should imagine that history will have a good laugh about the antics of the British Parliament just before the war of 1939 began.)

England in the spring and summer of 1939, in fact, looked more like a mangy mongrel bestirring itself sleepily to go and die by the roadside than a British lion preparing to turn at bay and rend its tormentors.

Columbus never looked at his new continent with more curiosity than I at my native land when I re-discovered it. It was strange, and a thing I regretted, to feel myself so alien in my own country, and to find that this feeling did not pass with time. But I had brought back with me from those years abroad something

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which put everything I saw in a new light. This was a standard of comparison, which I had lacked in the unquestioning days of my English youth; now I set all that I saw, men, manners and modes, against the things I had seen elsewhere, in other countries.

In this frame of mind I started out on my journey of discovery. I began with London, my home-town, and because night begins the day, I began at night. I sought the amusements of the town and, trying gamely to *bummeln* in London, I explored the theatres and music-halls, the cinemas and all the other places where Londoners go to laugh and refresh their minds.

The thing that struck deepest into my mind was the enormous difference, so little realized, that the coming of the film has made in the industry of entertainment, and even in the outlook of the nation. The picture-theatre and the things it offered, I discovered, affected the speech, the looks, the habits and the very minds of the people. The women, in increasing numbers, made-up, dressed, behaved and talked like the marionettes that were manipulated in some distant Californian studio, puppets whose every expression and word were formed, not by the impulse of their own feeling, but by the command of some off-screen producer with uplifted finger and instructions chalked on a slate. The majority of the young men and women of the country, I found, spent several hours each week in the picture-theatres, and their minds, unquestioning and plastic as mine had been, were moulded by anonymous men far away who were of alien blood and alien thought.

For the first time in history, as far as I know, one of the main methods of influencing the minds of people in one country was controlled by people thousands of miles distant who could neither feel for nor understand England, English history and English tradition. The richest and greatest country in the world, which had produced such poets as Shakespeare and such players as Garrick, for some reason produced no films and hardly any film-players of its own.

For some reason? I knew what the reason was. This was one of the things I had discovered in those years spent behind-the-

scenes. It was the old reason of the exclusive monopoly, the racket, the squeeze-out. The film-magnates far away meant to keep both the profit and the power of this mighty industry in their hands. There were a few 'British' films, yes. They were mostly produced by daughter-companies of those great concerns in California, and if I am any judge their business was to produce films which would never challenge the supremacy of those issued by one of the great Dictatorships of the world — the film dictatorship of Hollywood. Enormous picture 'palaces', bearing ridiculous names, such as Plaza and Regal and Pantechnicon and Pandemonium and Odious and the like, were springing up everywhere, but these too were controlled, in one way or another, by that fantastically powerful, cosmopolitan, not American, settlement which, from California, moulds the minds of immature and ignorant men and maids in countries far away.

This new form of entertainment was far more powerful than the theatre ever was or could have been. But it was not necessarily only a form of entertainment; it could also be a most subtle means of influencing the minds of the masses, if it were used to that end by the few men who controlled it.

And England, the sceptr'd isle, the land of the great poets and players, had no film-theatre of her own! It was fantastic, and this was, as I knew, an instance of the way in which the system of 'democracy' can be turned against itself, to defeat its own ends. For a free England, left to herself, would most certainly have produced great films and great picture players. But here, in naked audacity, was the system of the squeeze-out, of the alien financial dictatorship at work.

In music, of a sort, the same hidden tyranny was called 'song-plugging'; band-leaders played tunes, good or bad, that had been written in Broadway penthouses because they were secretly paid to do so, and by this means any song, of no matter what quality, could be made to be 'one of the song-hits of the season', and ballads that might have told of England were either never heard or never came to be written, while mill-girls and miners baa'd sheep-like about Mexico and Cuba and Idaho and eternally



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regurgitated all the other snivel-drivel, weep-wail-and-whine mixture-as-before:

The skies are blue  
And I am too  
All 'cos of you  
Boo-hoo, boo-hoo

This music-for-morons, on which the youth of Britain is bred, seems to be written to a simple formula by the song-plugging kings of New York. You choose some phrase, itself half gibberish and half pidgin English, from the current vocabulary of the English speaking peoples, say for instance, 'I'm telling you', and with the assistance of a dozen stock rhymes you then build around it a thing called a lyric:

With the moon above —  
I'm telling you  
That I'm in love —  
I'm telling you  
When all our dreams come true  
In paradise we'll be  
And we'll no more be blue —  
You're telling me —  
I'm telling you —  
Boo-hoo, boo-hoo

By slightly varying the tune and the sequence of the rhymes you may repeat the process indefinitely. And when you are ready, you plug your song. If you tire, you may disinter a ten-year-old or twenty-year-old variant on the same theme, and re-plug that. The great musical minds of Broadway seemingly were suffering from some fatigue about the time I returned to England, because several of the old 'song-hits' had in fact been resuscitated and were being plugged to the profit of their composers.

The moment when the song, old or new, comes to be plugged into the minds of that vast audience of English people, gathered respectfully about a million wooden boxes throughout the length and breadth of the land, is a dramatic one. The song-pluggers,

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kindly men who love all dumb creatures, dress the moment with the utmost ceremony. It is as if a princess were born or a new planet launched. First, the refanned voice, which so subtly conveys the suggestion that it comes from above the obligatory white shirt:

'And now, we present to you that great British star of the stage, screen and air, Judy Platinum, who is going to sing for you to-night a song that all England will be singing to-morrow. Here (clash) she (bang) comes (crash). Good evening, Judy!' (cymbals, roll of drums, and sustained blare from the band). And then: 'Thanks a lot, Cyril. Hello, boys. G'd evening, everybuddy. I wanna sing, for the foist time in England, Loco Mose's new song, the sensashunal Broadway success, "I'll be blue again to-morrow". Thank you, Heinie.' And so on, until the inevitable, 'Thanks, Judy, that was grehnd.'

This England. If and when the next war comes, I used to muse at about that time, the song-pluggers will certainly want us to fight for democracy and freedom to song-plug.

True, a voice was raised here and there against this practice. The *Evening News* proclaimed that 'The song-plugging racket must be stopped' and said: 'High officials of the B.B.C. are planning a fresh inquiry into the activities of song-pluggers . . . Music publishers and artists will be asked to co-operate with the B.B.C. in stopping this form of radio-racketeering. . . . Many artists have complained that in the past few weeks almost every one known to have a singing or playing booking on the air has been tempted by song-pluggers. Representatives of many music publishers have been busy. It is an open secret that large sums of money, from £10 to £100, are being offered for the broadcasting of two or three choruses that the publishers wish to "get over". Certain artists who have refused the offers of music publishers have complained that they are broadcasting at a financial disadvantage.'

But that was about the last that was ever heard of the matter. Yet it is a matter serious enough to deserve serious attention. The increasing subordination of the British mind to alien influences, through practices of this sort, is a grave thing. The British people

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have been through enough stirring experiences of all kinds in the last twenty years, to say nothing of the last ten centuries, for them to be able, given fair play and a free market, to produce their own music, literature, films and drama. They did in the past. Now their minds are atrophying from suppression, disuse and misuse.

Some of the songs that come to us across the Atlantic nowadays, from the other great land of the 'English-speaking peoples', seem to me almost unintelligible. Indeed, I see the day coming when really enterprising shopkeepers and others in this country may need to put up a sign, 'English spoken here', alongside 'Ici on parle français'. I have long and vainly tried to distil the English-speaking essence from some of the strange chants I have recently heard:

Fred Chopin  
Had his Georges San'  
And Alexander  
Had his ragtime ban'  
Metro-Goldwyn  
Had his Mayer  
But I've got nobody  
And nobody's got me

and

Although I'm rich or poor  
I still will love you more

Vomiting volcanoes!

The intellectual and spiritual diet of English people is by such means being progressively divested of the calories and vitamins and what-you-wills that it needs. As I wandered about London, those summer evenings of 1939, I observed that the Philharmonic Orchestra still survived; the second World War for Civilization was yet needed to bring it to the verge of death.

The Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, however, save for that brief period of the year when opera is 'in season' in England, those few weeks when the Mutual Admiration Society foregathers there mutually to admire its tiaras rather than to hear music, was given over to the half-crown-hop.

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Ballet, surprisingly, was experiencing a revival, probably to be short-lived, somewhere in the remote fastnesses south of the Thames, and its devotees were widely held in kindly derision; people of balanced mind were only uncertain whether to think of them as cranks or maniacs.

The theatre! Now that was a very different matter. In the theatre, as I saw it in London in those days, a sharp distinction had to be made between the plays and the players. The stage was being swamped by meretricious imported products similar, in their nature, to the films and songs that were being plugged elsewhere, and some of them reached a low level appalling in such a city as London. But many native players still remained, and in them the highest traditions of the English stage lived on. I never saw a good play better acted than *Ladies in Retirement*, with Mary Clare in the chief part; every character in it was played to perfection. A memorable evening, before the black-out fell on London. And Emlyn Williams, in one of his own plays, and Godfrey Tearle, in another, provided the other oases where I found refreshment in the desert of the London stage.

Some months later, after the Great War had been resumed, the plight of the London stage was accurately described, as I think, by a junior Minister, Mr. Kenneth Lindsay, in a speech to the Three Arts Club. When he spoke between thirty or forty theatres were playing in London's West End, many of them to crowded houses every night, and he remarked that there was scarcely a play in London worth seeing, save the classics. (The *Anspruchslosigkeit*, the lack of a discriminating standard, which English audiences show is to me one of the most astonishing signs of the state of mental atrophy into which the mind of the country has fallen: they applaud everything.)

Mr. Lindsay said, and I think truly, that 'the trouble is that new drama can only be born out of live people and we have been moderately dead for the last twenty years. Since the last war we have been living on our past and I hope that out of the present war there will be born some fresh artist. Great art is often born out of great wars'.

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It is true. England in the interval between the two halves of the Great War was like a train halted in open country because of some red signal that the passengers cannot see; a great puffing of steam can be heard but the train does not budge, and the people inside contemplate the same piece of country until their eyes grow tired of it, they fume and fret with impatience, but they have to stay put. They are the prisoners of the machine; not all their impatience nor all their ardour can avail them. Never was a time in our history so killing to the energy and vigour of youth. It was the heyday of old men, the golden age of the fearful and fretful, of the tired and anxious, of the lean and slippered pantaloons who always were in front and cried 'Back' while the young and eager behind vainly cried 'Forward'! And everything that period produced, on the stage and screen and paper, is typical of it. Now, at last, at long last, perhaps, perchance, the submerged and repressed vigour of the nation may break through that crust.

But the London theatre, as I saw it in 1939, and as it still is while I write, though it may have put forth new leaf by the time this book appears, was the child of that age. It could not deny its parent; the resemblance was too great. The people whom the players portrayed were people of no importance, not worth portraying; having no feelings, they could not make an audience feel anything; the things they said and the things they sang were alike trivial. Those times must have been as bad for an actor who loved his profession as for a journalist who loved his.

However, all these things look different from different points of view, and my point of view is but one. Those who were closer to the theatre did not all take so dark a view. For instance, the *Daily Sketch* reported that:

'Joe ("Never Give Up") Sacks, Russian-born producer of West End musical plays, gave final details of his affairs yesterday in his fourth public examination, and left the Bankruptcy Court, Carey Street, to plan his next production. "A little trouble like this can't put me down," Joe told a *Daily Sketch* reporter, his quaint foreign accent as attractive as ever. "I have the play all ready. All I want now is the stars." Although he can sign his name, Joe still

admits that even at 59 he cannot read or write. Probably that is why he said: "No straight plays for me. I can't understand them. I want music, girls, glamour, spectacular shows."'

Points of view! Sometimes in those London nights of 1939, when I was rediscovering my native town and was tired of contemplating the Café Royalists, when I was surfeited with plays and films, I stayed at home and read. I found, and I know that in this at least many other people shared my experience, that I could not read novels, or at any rate only the novels of an older time, those of Thackeray or Borrow or Dickens, which seemed to give a picture of something, but not the novels of my own time, which seemed like mirrors held over the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens; they reflected nothing but themselves, no life, no animation, no meaning.

They, too, were the true images of an empty and shallow age. They showed nothing of the great storm that was approaching the Round Pond, of the great human tragedies that were being enacted on its brink; at the utmost they caught a minnow passing. Like the politicians and the press, they pretended that there was no life beyond the Round Pond; or, as the Hungarians say, 'There is no life outside Hungary, and if there is life, it is not the same life'. Their common motto, 'We are not interested in the possibilities of war; they do not exist' was the forerunner of that lunatic phrase about the possibilities of defeat that was placarded all over England when the war came. They were about petty people who lived petty lives, who seemed incapable of a generous impulse or a great emotion.

But the times we were living in were great and stirring times, revolting but absorbing times, the best and the worst of times, and if I was to read anything I wanted to read something that mirrored these exciting times. I could not understand the mania of my fellow-countrypeople for those stupendously dull books which they miscall 'thrillers', which tell of a murder on the first page and of monstrously boring dialogues between the astute amateur detective and the stupid professional detective on the remaining 299.

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So I turned to books about our times, which were really thrilling, and about the world outside the Round Pond, to such absorbing stories as those of Alain Gerbault and Cecil Lewis, who went to the South Sea Islands to see what civilization had done there, and found that civilization in Tahiti meant syphilization, the destruction of civilization, so that I wish people would be careful when they say we are fighting to-day for civilization; I turned to the writings of contemporary politicians and historians, and to those of the high-speed journalists abroad, a remarkably fine body of men. With such tempests brewing in the world as were then brewing, I found that only such works as these could hold my attention.

Here you have the different points of view again, for about this time medals of the Royal Society of Literature were presented to two young poets, Mr. John Gawsworth and Mr. Christopher Hassall, in recognition of their work, and at the presentation the High Commissioner for Canada, Mr. Vincent Massey, who I believe is a graduate of Oxford University and brother of a leading actor said:

The professor of the future will point out to his students that it was significant of this period that the young writer, instead of expressing himself like his predecessors in a first novel, probably produced a work on European politics. He will probably observe that imaginative literature of all kinds seemed unduly preoccupied with political themes. Poets, dramatists, and novelists indeed appear to-day to be increasingly anxious to play the role of tractarians and pamphleteers. The student of the future may be told that one literary medium which remained true to its job was the humble detective story, of which I am a happy addict. No ideologies here, nothing tendentious, no preoccupation with politics or diplomacy — just a happy release for people who saw too much of either or both.

I pondered this opinion long and carefully. 'A happy release' — to read eternally about people who were released, suddenly if not happily, from this world? No ideas, no ideals, no ideologies, nothing tendentious — just a happy release!

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'Release'. 'Escape'. 'Dope'. 'Opium'. These, to me, were idols, and I preferred ideals. Such words best described the mentality of England between the first and second half of the World War; they were responsible for the second half. I detested them. They were the doctrine of a degenerate stage and degenerate press, of the Pashas in Hollywood: 'Don't worry, get yourself a girl friend, go to the pictures, take home a box of chocolates, settle down cosily with a thriller and turn on "Doomsday Night at Eight" on the radio, and all your dreams will come true you'll no longer be blue boo-hoo boo-hoo.'

I prefer other words: Effort, exertion, enthusiasm, and above all, no escape, but to look at unpleasant things, not pretend that they aren't there as a genteel Victorian dame who would rather go to the stake than show that she noticed a nasty smell, but to look at them and think how to change them and then get rid of them.

So there you have two points of view, set against each other with much distinctness.

Having pondered this forecast of 'Posterity's view of literature', delivered before the Royal Society of Literature, I came to the conclusion that, on balance, I for one did not regret that I had not written 'Murder by the Round Pond' or 'The Corpse in the Serpentine' as my first essay, and was glad I had written about things I had seen and felt and feared and hoped and experienced, for they were real, and the times were stirring, and I knew that if ever I tried to write novels or plays I would cut them too from life, like a slice of cake, and not try to produce lullabies and 'who-dunits' for those who sought a happy release. I knew that, if ever I should try to create people out of my imagination, the first one would be a living man or woman, and not a corpse.

It is a very strange thing, this habit or practice of trying to escape from everyday realities and problems, because they are unpleasant or difficult to solve, that has grown up in England of late years. It is not only strange, but an almost impossible thing to achieve in England, because the normal and healthy ways of escape are closed in this land. Escape to nature, for instance, is practically impossible, because the unplanned growth of the



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cities and the ribbon-building on their outskirts makes the way out too long and tedious, and even when you get out the land is in such an overwhelming proportion in private ownership and behind barricades that you cannot penetrate to it. Escape to congenial company, for instance, a pleasant hour at an inn, is almost impossible, too, because the inns are seldom pleasant and are usually shut at the hour when you need them. Of one long-dead Duke of Buckingham it was said, I believe, that he found his best companions in an inn, a thing more natural than reprehensible in a civilized society, but he would be a clever man who found good companions in an inn in England to-day, where laws beyond the understanding of mortal man have reduced drinking to a process similar to that of pigs swilling at a trough. They have not, to my knowledge reduced the amount of drunkenness or of liquor consumed; if those have diminished, the taxes on alcohol have caused it.

So the chief means of 'escape' in England is, or was in the summer of 1939, the alien-controlled 'film palace', and in my wanderings about London I studied these places a great deal, and the shadow-plays they showed and the people who watched them.

As songs were 'plugged', so were films 'plugged' into the mind of the masses, who lined up in their legions before the weirdly-named 'palaces' for their daily trip to dreamland. If ever they lived at all, these nameless millions, they lived in that make-believe world that flickered before them on the screen. Later, in the war, on a day when Hitler stood at the gates of Paris and the real world seemed about to collapse about our ears, when mortal calamity seemed to loom imminently over England, I came through Leicester Square and saw such a queue, of thousands of people, waiting patiently for hours on end to see 'Gone with the Wind'. With baffled incomprehension I contemplated the faces of the people who formed it, faces that told of lives of bleak drabness. Why, I thought, did they not seek to live themselves, instead of plunging into these darkened caverns in search of adventure and emotion at second-hand? Opium-smokers.

Once, on the radio, I heard a Londoner tell the moving story of his encounter, at a distance but still in the flesh, with his heroine

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from that shadow world. She was Grace Moore, whom he had long admired, and on a day she came to London, to sing at the Albert Hall, and he booked his seat to see her for weeks in advance, and at last the great night came and he saw her, whom he had so long revered, and heard her sing!

That was four years before the night when he spoke in the radio, and yet the feeling in his voice moved even me as he told of looking down and seeing, on the distant platform, a tiny figure in a white dress and with golden hair — HER! Beauty! Romance! Music! Still distant, but a little nearer than on the screen! A thing to dream about for years and years! The white lady with the golden tresses, singing, and the workaday Londoner, absorbed, in the darkness of the upper balcony!

What a glimpse of a Londoner's life. What a proof of the power of the films.

Even the speech of the people has been affected by this mighty and anonymously-wielded power. As I write, my reluctant ear has been listening to a competition, before the microphone, of young aspirants to parts in a radio play. Three young British girls, Britishwomen, oh, hang it, three young English girls with pleasant, well-modulated English voices, were required to deliver a test-piece, of which this is the last lunatic fragment: 'C'mon, big boy, giv'm the woiks; I c'n takeut.'

Shades of Shakespeare!

I was not surprised, when the war came, and a London picture newspaper held a referendum among its women readers to choose 'Britain's Perfect Soldier' (who at that time was saving Hollywood from Hitler in the air over the English coasts), ~~that~~ this ideal composite warrior, voted for by the womanhood of England and duly put together by the paper's picture-mounting experts, had the hair, eyes, nose, moustache and mouth of five Hollywood film-stars of mixed cosmopolitan origins. 'True, his physique was allowed to be that of 'a typical British Soldier', grave injury thus being done to Johnny Weissmuller. The result really meant, I suppose, that the ideal British fighting-man may look British from the ankles down.

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Inevitably, when the war came, 'the things we are fighting for' were 'plugged' into the mind of the British masses by Charlie Chaplin, on behalf of Hollywood, that paradise of equal-opportunity-for-all and home of tolerance and democracy. And just as inevitably, when the war is over, will the story of Britain's ordeal and triumph be made into pictures there by men neither British nor American in their origins and feelings, and from Wigan to Walthamstow the lads and lasses will go, open-mouthed and starry eyed, to see themselves as others wish them to see themselves. A genuine emotion, a real feeling, a lifelike but unhappy ending? Fie, pfui, and fi donc!

The real reason that I felt myself so alien in England, I thought, was that England had become so alien, so little English or British. The alienization of English life reached its highest point in the picture-theatre, the theatre and the radio. A Member of Parliament, Mr. MacLaren, in an excellent speech which hardly anybody outside Parliament ever heard of, once spoke with a deep loathing, shared by myself, of the cosmopolitan 'Whitechapel Yankees' whose voices reach us through the radio, singing such popular dirges (well and truly 'plugged') as 'If the earth should swallow me, I know that you would follow me, boo-hoo, boo-hoo'.

However, I feel that in this, as in many things, my view is a rare one. I like other people to enjoy themselves, and from the applause that is heard, from the sound of 'the boys' telling each other in quaint English that they are 'grand' and 'marvellous', I gather that a good time is had by all at the transmitting end. I even **have** some affection myself for those filleted voices, as of castrated curates, which announce the tidings of the day, good or bad, disastrous or cheering, in the level tone of a mildly facetious recording angel.

But there are other entertainments in London, my native town, and I sampled them all. The alien influence in the music halls was particularly strong, and though I should understand and welcome the appearance there of good singers, dancers, jugglers or acrobats from abroad (I saw few of these) I could not think why the friendship of the English-speaking peoples, which is to play so great a

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part in international affairs after the present war, as we are told, should lead to the importation from America of comedians who had not been there long enough to learn English and whose salacious humour and accent alike had been acquired somewhere between Cracow and New York's East Side.

Sometimes I saw turns which, as I should have expected, would have been hissed or bad-egged off the stage by any audience not composed of half-wits, or in any country where a sense of humour is indigenous. Once, several men of no identifiable nationality or mother-tongue exchanged gags, prompted to them by another. I believe 'stooge' is the current professional name for this calling. They had no talent save this, yet topped the bill and brought down the house.

For instance, one of them, a corpulent fellow, laughed on a high-pitched scale and his colleague, the prompter, said to him 'If you wanna lay an egg, go over there!' whereon the fat one, pulling up his coat-tails and drawing shapeless pants tight round his formidable posterior, waddled off to the corner, saying 'All right, and you like a teeny-weeny piece of bacon too, hein?' and then had to be hauled back with an appearance of outraged propriety. Another time, all the men gathered round the microphone, announcing that they were about to sing a song, and in the preparatory expectant hush one of them belched loudly. These jests raised hurricanes of laughter. In front of me, a pretty girl in her early teens bounced on her seat, clapped her hands delightedly and laughed herself nearly into a fit. I felt that if only one of these talented artists could have vomited or performed a natural function on the stage the entire audience might have had to be removed helpless with laughter.

The next turn was one demanding talent, strength and endurance. It was a roller-skating dance performed by two handsome and athletic men and two good-looking girls dressed in white tights and singlets. Languid interest accompanied it and an apathetic house sent perfunctory applause after it when it was finished.

And those Glamour Girls! Why Glamour? Clamour Girls, perhaps; the noise of their choruses ('Here we are so bright and gay

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and you can't hear what we say') might awaken the reluctant dead. Or Amour Girls, possibly: *die Mädels vom Chantant, die nehmen es mit der Liebe nicht so tragisch*, and why should they?

But glamour? It is not glamorous to stand about undressed in a draught, no pay for rehearsals or extra performances, for a pound or two a week and for the profit of some alien producer. The name, Glamour Girl, is a snare and a delusion — for the girl and for the public. The chance of promotion, of a real stage career, of making good, of bringing into play talent which is actually existent, is insignificant, in the condition of the English stage to-day. And yet at the back of those English stages, while the star mouths his pidgin English in front, you may see girls lovely in face and figure, afidget with youth and life and energy. They are the people who deserve to be helped. But not one of them in a hundred ever gets a chance. It is, behind the footlights, the story of England in the last twenty years all over again: youth held back, held down.

Another of London's entertainments that I learned to know, during those 1939 nights, was all-in wrestling. That all-in wrestling! I grieve to say that, to my belief, it would be disallowed — by the public, not by the authorities — in many of the foreign cities I know. I watched it in the company of a man who knew this sport thoroughly, because he was in it, and I came away dumbfounded by the exhibition — not by the exhibition in the ring, because for a little money you could apparently find a human being willing to have himself publicly inoculated with lepra germs, but by the exhibition which the public gave.

These wrestlers, as I came to know them, were in their private lives and among each other more or less harmless, average people, who wished none ill. A few were smart tricksters, but most were exploitees, whose misfortunes or deformities were capitalized by the promoters. They were chosen, mostly, for great strength and ugliness. The more brutal and animal-like they looked, the better.

There was one they called Methusalah. He had an enormous head about twice the normal size, and I supposed him to suffer from the disease from which, as I seem to remember, the painter Gauguin died — lion-head. This doubled his already remarkable ugliness.

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He was a gentle creature. Another, not much less hideous, they called the Liberrian Champion; he was a mechanic from Blackpool. The Champion of the Crimea was a thug from the slums of Port Said. And so on.

Mixed with them, so that the public should get value for money, were some good-looking ones, whose victory, after seemingly imminent defeat, was always prearranged. Every possible device was used to make the ugly men uglier — cropped heads, long beards, and the like. They were taught to roar like stricken bulls and squeal like stuck elephants, to shimmy-shake their skin, to grimace as if in mortal agony, to bare their teeth, bite, butt, and generally to behave as much like rabid gorillas as they could — but not to hurt each other.

I watched one of these prearranged contests between one of the best-looking young wrestlers, who was due to win, and one of the most villainous, the loser-elect, and asked myself, by what means had public taste and credulity been brought to this low level in England, the country of Bob Fitzsimmons and John Jeffries.

The match went according to plan. It was a hard struggle, but gradually the good-looking man, as the spectators wished, proved himself to be the better. The brute-man roared, snorted, bellowed, bit, grimaced, kicked, bear-hugged, gouged, but all to no avail — each time Adonis just outwitted him. The spectators purred; this was the stuff to give them.

But the organizers, being of the same fry which had brought this public up on amazing, sensational, mystery disclosure-revelations, heart-throbs and thrills, knew that it ought to see something more than a straight victory; it must have its awful moment just before the happy end, before the fade-out, before the kiss-and-be-happy-ever-after.

Suddenly, the gorilla butted Adonis in the stomach. Adonis, his face writhing horribly with simulated pain, fell on his back, gasped, contorted himself, groaned in anguish. Around the ring, pretty girls, their lips parted in suspense, clutched their bosoms in the neighbourhood of their hearts, assuming their anatomy is still what it was, I don't guarantee anything to-day. Beside them,

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young Englishmen blanched, and waited, hoping against hope, for evil to triumph over good.

They need not have worried; the organizers had thought of everything. Gorilla, supposedly intent on finishing his man, launched himself in a flying leap that was to land him with both feet on Adonis's stomach. But just before he got there Adonis, the white hope, rallied his last ounce of strength, shot up his legs like pistons, took gorilla in the stomach with his two feet, and sent him flying over the ropes into the second row of seats.

A pandemonium of cheering broke out around me. The white man had won, all was well. St. George had vanquished the dragon, democracy had conquered dictatorship, the gospel according to Hollywood had been vindicated. Adonis was carried shoulder high from the ring. Gorilla was carried away by attendants. Adonis, in the midst of his triumphs, looked anxious and distrait. He needed to, because he had mistimed and overloaded his kick, which by the prearrangement was only to have thrown gorilla across the ring. Gorilla now had concussion, and recriminations were brewing behind-the-scenes.

I was carried out into the dark street amid a throng of happy, laughing, chattering girls, clinging to the arms of contented, smiling men. 'Wozzid id awfud? I thoughtd he woz dud for, didldew?' My Buddha, thought I, these people certainly do all they can to justify the racketeers, political and private, in treating them as morons.

Scourging my soul further, I went to see roller-speedway-racing, which was just the same sport on roller-skates. The public went to see it on the understanding — the same understanding that prevailed on the appropriately-named dirt-track — that they would see somebody hurt. Its interest was titillated by tales of the injuries the girls had received during their careers — how they had been bruised all over, had their muscles torn, their skin gashed and burned, and so on. These good-looking young girls and men also had brought to a high pitch of efficiency the pantomime of pretending-to-be-angry-with-each-other, of tripping each other up, of falling over each other, of lashing out furiously at each

other, of gasping and kicking and writhing. Did the spectators really believe it? Is such credulity really possible? Or did they not care about that, as long as somebody seemed to get hurt, seemed to behave like a cornered hyena. I give it up.

In the England where I grew up this kicking and fighting and swearing and face-making — which was only pantomime, but which the spectators seemed to accept as genuine — would have been thought worse than bad sportsmanship. I believe it might have been hissed off. Not that that England was a particularly good place, but in some things it was seemingly a better one than now.

Most of the things I had seen and did not like, in these London nights of 1939, were alien and imported, they were not native. I had seen in other cities, Berlin and Vienna, Budapest and Prague, how native things, good things — good music, good songs, good talent, good entertainment — were smothered and elbowed aside in the same way.

Unrestricted free trade in goods is a doctrine long discredited, because it leads, for the natives of a country, to the very opposite of freedom — to dependence, to a form of enslavement, to alien control, to the lowering of home standards. The same thing is true of the goods and products of the mind, and particularly of entertainment, which nowadays is a form of education, or at any rate of influencing the mind of the people, more powerful even than the schooling received in youth.

I have shown how, by such methods as song-plugging and film-plugging and other kindred arts, free-trade-in-entertainment can be turned to the disadvantage of the native talent of a country, of its standards and traditions. A large measure of protection for indigenous talent and particularly for native standards is even more essential in the things of the mind than in things material, in the country that bred Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton, Dickens and Thackeray, Garrick, Kean and Mrs. Siddons.

One other thing I saw in London at night, in 1939 — the dance. Dancing seemed to me, in those bad twenty years between the first and second bouts of the World War, to have reached as low



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a level of taste and skill as most other things. The waltz and the polka seemed gay and graceful compared with the dances of that era, when a roomful of couples pushing each other here and there resembled a plateful of pea-soup being slowly stirred with a spoon. The Lambeth Walk brought a faint hope of better times, but that period in the history of the dance closed with the Boomp-a-Daisy, in which the bow-and-curtsey of less enlightened times was reproduced in a form better suited to 1939: the partners imparted a chaste salute upon each other by banging their behinds together, an innovation which seemed to me to verge on the inelegant without being funny.

So, after a study of the illustrated press printed in America (I abstain from saying the American illustrated press) I was prepared to be depressed again when I went to see the Jitterbug Marathon in Tottenham Court Road. We only lacked this, I thought. A first sight of the company assembled fortified my misgivings: negroes and negresses, Jews and Jewesses, quadrooms, octoroons and picaroons at first prevailed. The men were in trousers, shirts and braces (poidon me, suspenders), or in short-sleeved open-necked shirts and pullovers. The girls wore simple frocks or knickers and bare legs, which didn't matter much, because they were often inverted anyway. Antics. Grimaces. Yells.

But later I saw the Jitterbug danced in different company and liked it. Danced by good-looking and healthy young people, with some sense of human dignity, it was lively and gay and amusing, infinitely preferable to the dreary shuffle-along dances of the between-war era. It was a dance into which young people might put youth and laughter and enthusiasm. They looked, dancing it, as if they might have a better time than the generation before them, and I wished them luck.

These were the things I saw in London, at night time, in the summer of 1939. The shadows were gathering over this city, or, as I had written at the opening of the year, the twilight was thickening above it. Death and destruction and defeat were at its door, and I had watched them approach for seven years. I

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had seen them arrive in two other cities, and had passed through a third just ahead of them.

But in those places I had always thought of London, which was my own home town, the capital of my own country. Now as I walked about its streets I felt just as I had felt in Vienna and Prague and Warsaw, the only man who knew, quite certainly, what was coming, and coming soon. Nobody else knew or even thought much about it or even cared, that I could see. I asked myself often enough, why worry? and told myself irritably that I ought to get this itch out of my blood, the itch that came of belonging to a generation that had really believed, once, that it had fought a war to end war, that war could be prevented. But it was all of no avail, because I knew, now, quite certainly, that war *could* be prevented.

The knowledge of that prevented me, and always will prevent me, from acquiescing, from accepting the 'happy release' of the detective novel, the box of chocolates; the film palace, the radio and the girl friend.

Determined to distil the last drop of honey from London's night life in 1939 I went to London's nude theatre. Though none surpasses me in my admiration for the female form unclothed in the right place, by which I mean of course the Louvre or the National Art Gallery, I have in the process of much bummelling in many parts of Europe come keenly to dislike these dreary exhibitions of shivering and underpaid girls standing about in laboured attitudes to be looked at by hordes of males. When I lived in Paris my obstinate sales-resistance nearly broke the heart of the persevering, hard-working and frugal-living little man who lived in the next attic and tried every time he met me to sell me some of his feelthy postcards, and my feeling about these shows was the same; I find the private contemplation of one beautiful woman, on canvas or in marble, as I said before, an absorbing occupation, but to pay money in order to see complete strangers with less clothes on than they wear in other theatres is a thing outside my understanding.

So I went ready to be bored, but actually I was much amused.

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For the audience was composed entirely, without a single exception, if I remember rightly, of men, young and old, who had seemingly come to see life in the raw, as Port Said and Marseilles know it, and who waited hungrily, with riveted gaze, for the nude, the rude, and the lewd.

It came after an hour or more of quite normal, and if anything overclad turns. The curtains parted to show a darkened stage, the band played appropriately soft music, a man in full evening dress and a woman in an evening frock appeared from opposite sides and began to dance a waltz, and then the spotlight lifted from them and began to travel slowly up a flight of stairs at the back of the stage, finally revealing to the breathlessly expectant male audience IT — the thing all had been waiting for.

And it was a girl in classical draperies, showing a good deal of one leg and the left half of a pair of breasts! I was moved by this supreme anti-climax to let out a hoot of laughter which startled three rows of people in front of me and came away in high good humour.

But I felt, wandering about London those summer nights before the black-out fell upon the city, that I was alone enough in these feelings to count as a stranger within my own gates, as a homeless patriot, as no land's man. It was a funny feeling.

## CHAPTER 3

### LONGITUDE AND PLATITUDE

At a point in Westminster where the Nth degrees of longitude and latitude meet stand the Houses of Parliament, and towards them I bent my way on a day in that brief summer of 1939 between my return to England and the resumption of the war called Great.

I was anxious to see Parliament at work again, for in my opinion of that institution, too, a change had occurred similar to that I told of in the man who went up the gangway in 1927 in a black hat and the man who came down it in 1939. A similar change, and part of the greater change, an essential part of it indeed, because the bearing of the British Parliament had done more than any other thing to make me lose hope that the new war would be prevented.

But this change had occurred in a shorter time, because I had last visited Parliament only four years before, in 1935, and looked down from its gallery upon Mr. Baldwin, who in the meantime had had opportunity, as Lord Baldwin, to gratify his oft-expressed wish for the company of his pipe, his pigs and his constituents. In 1935, when I had surveyed the House of Commons from above, all good men within it were supposed to have been agreed that Germany's incorrigibly aggressive ambitions had been demonstrated beyond doubt and that high time was come to thwart her in her new warlike designs by making a pact with France and Russia to oppose her with force immediately she tried any new act of aggression. To that very end Anthony Eden was then, in 1935, about to go to Moscow, as the first British Minister to venture near that Chamber of Horrors, and I was going, too, as one of the journalists sent to report his mission.

That was why I was at the House that day, when I watched the Commons approve his undertaking. That day, in 1935, I took it all seriously. I really believed that the British Government and

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Parliament meant to do the one and only and obvious thing which could preserve the peace in Europe and prevent the further spread of Communism in Europe — make that watertight pact with France and Russia which Germany would never dare to attack.

But now, four years later, in 1939, when I looked down again on the House, many strange things had happened. First, Italy, not Germany, had committed the next act of aggression, in Abyssinia, and the very Parliament on which I looked down had been elected in the autumn of 1935 to lead the world in punishing and crushing that aggression, the Tory Party having been returned with an enormous majority to that very end.

Next, the leader of the Tory Party, the new Prime Minister upon whom I now looked down, had not long after declared that it would be 'midsummer madness' to attempt any such thing, a view which the enormous majority, and seemingly the voters in the country, as stoutly endorsed as they had acclaimed the opposite view a few months before.

Then both Germany and Italy had committed the next attack, in Spain, in support of a Generalissimo who had risen against a Government elected by popular vote, as had been the Chamberlain Government in Britain. Yet *The Times*, which when the next Great War came was loudly to proclaim that Britain was fighting the cause of democracy, attacked the Government of Spain, beleaguered by its own rebels and two Great Powers, as 'an offspring of the Soviet Government'. The Tory Government, which was with equal fervour later to proclaim that same thing, implicitly took the same line about the Spanish Government and, by denying supplies to both sides impartially in the name of 'non-intervention', effectively caused its defeat. So by that time, say 1937-38, the Russian Government, which was to have been enlisted to combat aggression, was being treated in a hostile manner, and the aggressors were being helped to their successes.

All this made the resumption of the Great War inevitable, since it strengthened the aggressor powers and weakened those which were ready to resist them. The Parliament of March 1935 had

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indeed clearly seen that this would be the effect if aggression were tolerated or encouraged; that was why it sent Anthony Eden to Moscow; that was why it had had itself re-elected, with a much larger Tory majority, to put a stop to aggression. And after the Abyssinian and Spanish affairs Germany, in her turn, had annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia, and Italy, again in hers, Albania, so that the war, foreseen in 1935 to be inevitable if such things were allowed, was now clearly on the doorstep.

And yet — all this time, with the war coming nearer, and even being beckoned nearer, and helped nearer we were not even re-arming! True, years before this, the Government had admitted the necessity for rearmament — long before Munich, long before 1938. True, the money had been voted, and spent! Two thousand million pounds in eight years!

Yet now, in 1939, when I looked down on Parliament, we had no arms! We were not ready! Sir Nevile Henderson, one of Mr. Chamberlain's chief apologists, was later to say that at the time of Munich — in September 1938! — we had hardly a single aeroplane or anti-aircraft gun! This, indeed, was to be put forward as Mr. Chamberlain's chief claim to the gratitude of the country — that he had saved us from war when we were not ready! At that time he had been Prime Minister for nearly two years, and before that for seven years second Minister in the Cabinet! He had long been Chancellor of the Exchequer! The money, millions and millions of it, had been spent! Why had we no arms, why were we not ready, when all the dangers had long been foreseen and admitted, the money voted and spent!

Looking down on the House of Commons from the Gallery I asked, 'Why?' It is the one major question in all this story to which I have never found the answer. The facts are staggering, the motives hidden, only the result is plain — war. War — and why?

Almost everybody professes to know quite certainly what history will say about this or that. I do not, and in any case I am indifferent, because history is a proved mental deficient. But the historian will be a lucky or a clever man who probes to the real

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motives that governed British policy in those years. For my part I can say, as one of many British newspaper correspondents abroad, that when we saw the British Government and Parliament marching downhill to the cry 'We are marching uphill', we, in our innocence, loudly cried 'Hey, you're wrong, you are marching downhill'. But men who uttered that warning cry found, to their initial surprise, that they were very coldly treated, that they were rebuffed and sidetracked and called 'Reds!' and 'extreme anti-Nazis' and the like more, and were even prejudiced in their employment!

The facts are very grave. Only the decay of the British Parliament and the seeming apathy or feeling of impotence of the British people can explain that there has been no reckoning, no calling-to-account.

On this day in the summer of 1939 I looked down with feelings of angry bewilderment on the House. Mr. Chamberlain sat in the place where, four years before, I had seen Mr. Baldwin, already then avowedly and admittedly aware to the full of the dangers that threatened. Sir Samuel Hoare, the Abyssinian episode long since forgotten, was back there, and so was Sir John Simon, and all the others. Behind them the enormous majority, impregnably entrenched in power by the three-card-trick played on the electorate, which thought it had in 1935 picked the card 'Resistance to aggression and peace', only to find, in turning it over, that it had chosen the card 'Condonation of aggression and war'.

It was a cabinet of elderly men, the average somewhere around 60 years, backed by a great majority whose leading members were not much younger. Youth sat on the back benches under the watchful eye of the Chief Whip, a disciplinarian whom Hitler might have envied, and with stern means of enforcing his will and obedience to The Party, right or wrong.

On the other side of the House, the Opposition side, on the Labour benches, the picture was no better. The Labour Party on which I looked down, still suffering from the desertion of its foremost leaders in 1931, had degenerated from the vigorous and

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idealistic and upward-striving group that took form at the beginning of the century into a throng of elderly trades union officials, professors and time-servers (the average age of 80 trades union members of parliament was about 61) whose ideas and ideals no man could understand. On that side of the House, too, age immovably packed the front ranks and youth sat impatient at the back. Just as junior Tory members went in fear of the Tory Chief Whip, so were younger Labour members sternly repressed by the elderly gentlemen in front, especially after Labour leaders entered the Government during the war, so that one such young Labour member who ventured to criticize some action of the Government was vilified as being 'lukewarm about the prosecution of the war' from the Labour Front Bench, a charge which he acquitted by calling his mentor 'a pimp of the Government'.

A few months after the day I went to the House, the good Lord Halifax in a speech at Oxford University told its members that 'the real conflict to-day is not between youth and age but between youth and youth'.

Even I, hardened to almost anything by the events of the last ten years, start at the audacity of such a claim. The men who had charge of Britain's policy between the two instalments of the present World War were always old, and clung to offices to which they were not equal with all the savagery of limpets defending their young. Many of them do so still. They had a faith in their pristine vigour, never vindicated by events, that is usually seen only in elderly gentlemen who fall in love. If the conflict is between youth and youth, they might at least allow youth to take charge of it. But do they? No.

If youth, the generation of 1914, had ever had its chance in England this war would not have happened.

'A conflict between youth and youth'? The war that was resumed a few months after I went to look at the Parliament which I had watched in helpless bewilderment from abroad for so many years is a conflict between youth and youth only in the sense that young men are fighting it, as they fought the last.

Old men made it, by allowing it to happen. They stand ten



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times convicted out of their own mouths, by their own actions, by the ludicrous way that events always gave them the lie before the words had quite left their lips.

But even when all that is said, a question still unanswered remains — where were the arms, for which so much money was asked, voted and spent? Is it not fantastic that even this gigantically culpable piece of remissness should be twisted into an argument in defence of the men who were guilty of it — that Mr. Chamberlain, who had for so many years been second minister in the Government, should have been acclaimed, and still to-day be acclaimed by so many of his contemporaries, for saving us from war 'when we were not ready'?

If the principle of the non-accountability of Tory Ministers, whatever they do, has become an established one in Britain, even worse things may happen after victory in the war which was the inevitable result of these omissions. It makes Parliament meaningless:

'Mr. Chamberlain's policy is leading this country straight to war' — 'Sir, you are a Red, Communist, Bolshevik, irresponsible alarmist, and warmonger; you are trying to wreck this noble man's policy of appeasement, which is leading us straight to peace.'

'Mr. Chamberlain's policy has now led us straight to war; because he is of proved incapability, he should immediately give way, preferably to a much younger man.' 'Sir, you are a Nazi, Fascist, defeatist, and pacifist; you are trying to wreck this noble man's conduct of the war, which is leading us straight to victory.'

'Mr. Chamberlain has now resigned, as is fit and proper, but I see that he and many who were co-responsible with him still remain in the Government; because their incapability has now been demonstrated beyond doubt I think without rancour that they should make way, preferably for younger men; they should go their way, and go in peace.' 'Sir, you are trying to wreck the unity of the nation at this fateful moment in its affairs by recriminations about the past; you are hindering our war effort.'

'Mr. Chamberlain is now dead, and this event confirms me in the belief I long held, that he was past his full physical and mental

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vigour when he held, and stubbornly retained, an office that carried with it the destiny of this country; the fruits of this are plain to see in the wreckage all around us, and they fortify me in my view that there is something very wrong in a system which, from the interests of one party, make impossible a change in the occupancy of a high office and in the pursuit of a false policy when the interests of the entire country so clearly demand this.' 'Sir, you are decrying the noble dead; you are a traitor and a cad.'

A conflict between youth and youth!

When I watched the Commons at work, that day in 1939, I had been long enough in my own country to study its people a little and to remark the apathy about Parliament which had spread. It was understandable, because it was the result of many disillusionments and of a lack of choice.

The electorate had seen that the Parliaments it returned always, invariably, did exactly the opposite of that which had been promised and that which it had returned them to do, and felt, furthermore, that there was no means of remedying this, because no clearcut difference was apparent between the two parties which faced each other in the House; appalling though the Tory Party's record was, the Labour Party offered no clear alternative.

Those people who saw what was wrong, to what disasters all this would lead, still could not see how they could help to better things. To vote, at the next election, for Professor Theory (Lab.) instead of Colonel Pondicherry (Con.) would not make much difference; they knew that from past experience. And in any case there would not be a next election, in time to prevent the next war; the Tory Party, by getting itself elected in 1935 to nip aggression in the bud, had made sure that it would remain in office for five years and thus be still in office when aggression, un-nipped, blossomed into the full red flower of a new world war in 1939.

Nevertheless, a country gets the Parliament and Government it deserves, and the England of 1939 deserved the House of Commons I saw in that summer. I never saw, anywhere, so general a pre-occupation with trivial things, so little interest in great national ones. I never found anywhere so much apathy and ignorance.

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The ruling class, the plus-four and petit-four coterie, thought a great deal about politics, without perceiving anything; for it the fate of the world hung upon Mr. Chamberlain, and the general idea seemed to be that if he were removed from office a Bolshevik would forthwith appear beneath every bed.

The middle class was the prey of the 'escape' mentality; it seemed to think that if it only went to the pictures often enough, listened to the radio often enough, read enough thrillers, all would in the end be well.

The most enlightened people I met were among the working-class masses, but their enlightenment came, not from instruction, but from instinct. Most of them saw clearly enough that a war was coming to them, and soon, and they were the most critical people I met — and the most sensitive for Britain's honour! But they felt themselves disfranchised and impotent and, though they muttered occasional imprecations about the age of senility in which they lived, they quickly dismissed such thoughts, as being vain, and got on with their jobs.

Such an electorate, lacking all coordinated energy, is an easy prey for political organizers, and, since it imparts no impulse to Parliament from beneath, Parliament was bound to descend to its level.

Sitting in the gallery of the House that day I thought of the way the electorate had been duped and misused for party purposes since the war to end war was interrupted in 1918. At the first election after that war the enthusiasm of the electorate, mourning its million dead, lying in graves that 'girdled the world', had been kindled for a proposal to 'Hang the Kaiser' and an adequate majority had been returned to Parliament for that purpose. Once safely ensconced in office, the rulers of that day had shelved the proposal to hang the Kaiser, who spent twenty years in a villa in Holland, soon to be overrun by German soldiers, and its people massacred in scores of thousands, and in course of time received birthday congratulations from the British King; he will probably end his days in Potsdam.

The proposal to 'Hang the Kaiser', incidentally, was buried by

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the executioners-elect under the holy-sounding argument that 'it would be most imprudent to make a martyr of the former Kaiser', and as I see that this lunatic phrase has been resurrected quite recently I should like to ask in what way we should be worse off to-day if we had made a martyr of the former Kaiser, and if Hitler is likely to receive birthday wishes in twenty years' time. The main reason for the recurrence of these world wars, if they are not actually desired and brought about by the anti-martyr school, is that warlords and dictators are never martyred, but, after shouting for years about the glory of death on a battlefield, retire in the moment of defeat to inglorious but peaceful villadom in some neighbouring neutral land.

The only time, for centuries, that this country enjoyed a long period of rest from the necessity to intervene on the Continent of Europe was after Napoleon had been relatively martyred by exile on a bleak and distant island, and I can say with the utmost certainty now that the length of peace we shall enjoy after this war will be measured by the degree of harshness with which we treat Hitler and his prompters after the present war, if we can get them into our hands. If we begin again to show our Christian spirit of forgiveness by giving them slices of other people's territory we might as well not bother about peace, but make this war permanent.

The next time that an enormous Tory majority in Parliament, for a space of years, was secured by tricking the electorate was in 1924, when, on the eve of the voting, a letter from a high Bolshevik politician, Zinovieff, was suddenly thrown into the ring to suggest to the electors that unless they voted Tory they would immediately be murdered in their beds. Many students of political tactics have since declared their opinion that the Zinovieff letter was a forgery; but whether it was authentic or false, the danger of Bolshevism in England at that time was rather less than the danger of an attack by Martians.

This trick, indeed, was exactly the same, though in another form, as that used by Hitler and his men in Germany in 1933, when they fired the Reichstag. 'This,' they said, pointing to the

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flames, 'is what will happen to your hearths and homes if you do not vote National Socialist. Behold, we have saved you from Bolshevism!' 'This,' said the Tory press lord, Rothermere, as he flung the Red Letter at the electorate through the columns of the *Daily Mail*, 'is what will happen to you if you do not vote Tory! Vote Tory, if you would be saved from Bolshevism!'

The credulity of the masses is so great that such devices can seemingly be used over and over again. You can fool the great majority of the people all the time. Masses of human beings whose lives, between the cradle and the grave, will inevitably remain on the most placid plane of humdrum uneventfulness, love to think that they actually walk amid great dangers and that they are saved from these by their chosen delegates, sitting watchful and wary at Westminster. Men whose greatest adventure is the daily train journey to town, women whose highest excitement is to 'go shopping' seemingly love to feel that, but for these wise guardians, they would be sprung upon and bludgeoned by bewhiskered anarchists at the next station, the next turning.

Nothing, if I may repeat, is wasted in this life in such prodigious quantities as fear. Yet, in all these between-war years, one great danger threatened and came always nearer, something really worth fearing — the danger of a new war. It was clear and gigantic. No need to trick the electorate on that issue: an enormous majority could have been had at any time by an honest man who said: 'A new war threatens and we are in imminent danger of losing the fruits of our victory in the last war, as well as much more life and treasure; give me arms and men now, and I can hinder it.' But no. Here, where there was really something to fear, the electorate was humbugged again — by being told that there was nothing to fear.

'If I had told the country, Germany is re-arming and we must re-arm, that would have made the loss of the election certain from my point of view.' (This is what Baldwin said in 1935.)

It is not even true. On that issue, plainly stated, the Tory Party could have had, and for once deserved, its enormous majority.

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The next election came in 1931. By that time fear of the Bolsheviks had subsided and the electorate had to be saved from something else. A major trade crisis racked Britain and the world, millions of unemployed stood idly about the country, and South Wales, Durham and Jarrow, gaunt, cadaverous, bitter and forgotten, mocked the noble phrases of the statesmen who had conducted the World War and the inscriptions on the memorials to the dead alike.

At such a crisis all good men clearly needed to come to the aid of the Tory Party and the foremost Labour Leaders stepped out of their own ranks and joined it, so that Britain might be saved 'from going off the gold standard'. The electorate knew not in the least what the gold standard was, but the prospect of being saved from something was again an irresistible lure, and this time the Tory Party gained so enormous a majority that the House of Commons, being almost bereft of an Opposition, came to look like the legislature of a Dictatorship State.

As soon as the new members were comfortably settled in their seats Britain went off the gold standard.

In 1935 another election came. By this time the first moves towards the resumption of the World War — the reintroduction of conscription in Germany and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia — had already been made, and the time was ripe for Britain to be saved from aggression. On that issue the Tory Party made its appeal to the country, which immediately and ardently responded. The enormous Tory majority returned to the House.

Immediately afterwards the process of propitiating Italy began and before a few months had passed the idea of opposing her annexation of Abyssinia was being openly derided as 'mid-summer madness'. The process led, inevitably, foreseeably and within four years, by way of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Albania to the open resumption of the World War. As I write this second half of the World War is seemingly being won, for us, on the playing fields of Athens. Strange to think, in the light of the Italian performance against the Greeks, one of the weakest and most poorly equipped military nations in Europe, how easily the whole drift

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towards war could have been prevented by stamping out that first essay in aggression.

This Parliament of 1935 was the one upon which I looked down, with such feelings of anger and incomprehension in the summer of 1939. As I write it still sits, having prolonged its life for another year, and who knows if it may not still be in existence, still dominated by men of the same type, when this war ends?

I have devoted my main criticism to the Tory Party, because this was the party which, by the devices I have described, recurrently secured for itself an overwhelming majority in the House and then pursued policies which made the prevention of war impossible.

But just as much criticism falls upon the Labour Party, which in those years failed to offer the electorate any clear alternative. The British Labour Party as it was in those years, and as it still is to-day, reminds me most strongly of that degenerate German Socialist Party, the sickly offspring of the great striving movements of the nineteenth century, which at the first outbreak of the World War was only divided upon the question, whether to rise in Parliament and cry 'Hoch' for the Kaiser or only to rise; which after that war called in the generals and the free corps to suppress its own people; and which at the coming of Hitler failed to strike a single blow in defence of itself, parliamentary government, or Germany.

The British Labour Party to-day in spite of all past lessons, seems to me to have no plan for the future, no ideal, no vision of an England made better, not by taking away from those who have much, but by raising the level and improving the lot of those who have little. This party shows no sign of having realized, for instance, the enormous opportunity of raising the mental and physical standards of the coming generation which lie in the dispatch of hundreds of thousands of children from the city slums to the countryside. They are there, in groups of two and three and four, at the mercy, for better or worse, of the private householders with whom they have been quartered. There is no general supervision of their welfare, no exploitation of this unique opportunity to

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train their minds and bodies in a greater patriotism. Are they, when the war is over, simply to return to the slums, there to resume life as they lived it before, after this glimpse of a better and healthier and freer life? Would a real working-class party fail to seize such a chance of eradicating from their minds the feeling that they are just individual, lower-class children hiding from bombs, and training them to feel that they are members of a community?

I cannot see that the British Labour Party of to-day is a 'working-class party'. Too many of its representatives are trades union officials, as were the German Socialist leaders and deputies, and when a man has been a trades union official for many years he ceases to be a working man and becomes a bureaucrat, just like the civil servant. Too many others are professors and members of that class which is called intellectual, a word not to be confused with intelligent. Anybody who cares to study the debates in Parliament day by day and word by word, as I did after I returned to my native land, may be astonished to find how little some of these representatives of 'Labour' seemingly think about unemployment, the slums, under-nourishment, mis-education and the derelict areas, and how preoccupied, or even obsessed, they seem to be with the task of finding jobs for 'friendly aliens' or of furthering the cause of discrimination against the Arabs in Palestine.

But the thing that stupefied me, as I looked down on Parliament that day, was the thought of the long acquiescence of that vast phalanx of back-bench Tory members in the front-bench Tory policy which had made the avoidance of war impossible. This was a thing I then found inexplicable. I knew that there must be among them many who were not merely self-seekers and Yes-men, yet in all those years a protesting voice had been a rare thing.

I knew there must be many men of high ideals and high patriotism there. Why, then, had they not made their voices heard regardless of cost and consequence, and forced the old men in front to listen? Even such men as Anthony Eden and Duff Cooper, who



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had made their protest and gone, and been proved ten times right, seemed, as I judged from the subsequent silence of the one and the writings of the other, to labour under a feeling of the enormity of their offence in challenging the dictates of The Party, and none had followed them.

I did not know then, having been too long abroad to study the inner mechanism of Parliament, what later became widely known: that the Tory Party had perfected not only an electoral routine by which it could, for many years, be sure of repeatedly retaining its great majority, but that it had also perfected a system for ensuring the obedience of its members, once returned. The Whip's Hand ensured that these members should vote for The Party, Right or Wrong.

The devices which were used are now known to anybody who has studied the decay of Parliament in those between-war years. They were so effective that Britain had to be brought to the verge of catastrophic defeat before enough members rebelled for the changes in leadership and policy that alone could (and did) save the country to be made, and when that ultimately happened several members openly referred with much bitterness to this regime of the Whip's Hand which had so greatly contributed to bring the country to its mortal plight.

Not enough that young and ardent and patriotic members knew that, if they rebelled against a policy which they feared and distrusted, they would court ostracism in the Party, that they might be attacked and denounced and disowned by the elderly gentlemen who controlled the Tory Associations in their constituencies, that they would not again be nominated for Parliament by these Associations, that in Parliament they might experience a strange difficulty in 'catching the Speaker's eye' and thus be condemned to an embittered and impotent silence, that they would become ineligible for the titles and other glittering prizes which were often the rewards of trooping unquestioningly into the Party lobby every time a vote was taken and remaining quiet during debates.

All these things they might have risked. But worst of all was the

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knowledge that they would disqualify themselves for promotion in The Party, that they would never be able to rise in politics and have a hand in shaping policy. This, however, was the thing they had gone into Parliament to achieve. What were they to do? Cross the House to the Labour back benches, where the Socialist bosses were equally hostile to independent thought and action?

It was a cruel dilemma. From the moment Hitler came to power in Germany, on January 30th, 1933, war in Europe became inevitable — unless it were prevented by Britain. This regime in Parliament, which in its way so much resembled Hitlerism, which was the negation of 'democracy' and 'freedom' and 'Parliamentary government', made its prevention impossible.

Here and there was a man whom nothing could silence, but his voice was but one in a wilderness. Such a man was the young Tory member, Ronald Cartland. He was wealthy; not that this means anything, because wealth is more often a breeder of fear than of courage, and men of great possessions, panic-stricken lest they should lose them where no reason for panic existed, played a great part in shaping the muddled policies which made the prevention of war impossible. But of Cartland it may truly and proudly be said 'That was an Englishman'. Because he was rich he did not think that all was and would be well with England as long as he could have his huntin', and shootin' and fishin'. He knew of and detested the derelict areas and called them by this name, and refused to call them by the name, Special Areas, which his fellow Tories had given them in the English fashion of playing shut-eye to all unpleasant things, of sidetracking the necessity to cure them by pretending that they do not exist. He wanted them to be abandoned and completely rebuilt. He hated the commercial ruination of England's countryside, and everything else that an Englishman should hate who feels himself an Englishman, and not just a member of this party or that class. For years he fought against the Whip's Hand and on the eve of the present war, when it came, he made a bitter attack on Mr. Chamberlain which was angrily reproved by the elderly Tory members who formed that Tory leader's especial bodyguard.

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'We are in the situation', he told the House, 'that within a month we may be going to fight and we may be going to die.' He went, he fought, and he died; at all events, he was posted as missing and has never been heard of since. The last that was heard of him was just before the retreat to Dunkirk, when a brother member, Captain Basil Bartlett, met him in France and reported 'He's rabidly anti-Chamberlain. He's waiting for another secret session, when he'll go and attack the old gentleman once again for apathy and ignorance'.

And so it has been in England, since 1914. The best go, and as they go old men yap at them. Some do not return. Those who come back find old men blocking every path that promises to lead to a better England.

I thought, as I studied the House of Commons that summer's day in 1939, with the war now close at hand but still just preventible, and saw that there was no hope from either of the parties in this House, what a pity it was that this emergency had not thrown up in England a new party, a patriotic party of men free from the shackles of rigid class distinctions and resolved to hinder war, if it still could be hindered, and to better domestic conditions in England — a British League, or British Legion, or League of British Yeomen, or something of the kind, a party in which youth and energy and honesty from both sides of the House could find a home.

Tragic it was that the only new party which had emerged was an imitation of the Nazi and Fascist parties in Germany and Italy. I could understand that there were some things about National Socialism and Fascism which might, at a distance, look attractive to younger men in England who saw the things that were bad to rottenness in their own system, though I knew that such illusion was impossible to anybody who had seen either them, or their Red cousin, Communism, at close quarters. If such illusions were possible in England, incidentally, they were largely due to the rich Tory milors who, thinking in their dunderheadedness that National Socialism or Fascism would save them from that imaginary Bolshevik-beneath-the-bed, persisted in spreading the ludicrous and lying legend that these regimes were 'social experiments'

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whereas they were both that age-old bully, militarism and war, in shirts of a new colour.

In an age of such misinformation it was comprehensible that disappointed and frustrated people in England should really have believed that National Socialism and Fascism had merits lacked by their own system of government, which paid lipservice to 'democracy' but in practice was just as anti-democratic as they.

But Sir Oswald Mosley and his Fascists or Blackshirts or whatever-they-call-themselves showed that they were even more muddle-headed than the Tories and Socialists in wishing to imitate the Nazis and Fascists to the point of subordination, of making themselves auxiliaries of an alien regime. For the basis of both National Socialism and Fascism, the one thing that enabled either to gain a hold over the German and Italian masses, was the patriotic appeal — my country right or wrong, first and foremost and all the time, and the devil take the others.

If Sir Oswald Mosley or any other wished to emulate either of these regimes, therefore, he could only have hoped to succeed by putting the patriotic appeal in the first place on his programme, and that would immediately, automatically and inevitably have meant opposition to Hitlerism and Fascism, for both these regimes were patently bent on territorial expansion and could only expand at the cost of Great Britain.

For though you may possibly create a patriotic mass movement, by promising territorial aggrandizement, by setting about to make your country 'mightier yet', you cannot possibly achieve this end by promising territorial diminution, by advocating non-resistance to those who wish to humiliate you and dethrone you from your pride of place in the world. This is what the rich milors at one time seemed to wish, until events and the feeling of the country became too strong for them, and they fled to distant island paradises to await there the end of the war they had done so much to make inevitable. What Mosley tried to do was to create in England under the name of 'Fascism', which means 'militarism, territorial expansion, conquest, glory and aggrandizement', something which meant 'submission, surrender, humiliation and the loss of territory',

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and this is lunacy. If he had put 'Resistance to German and Italian aggression' in the forefront of his programme, if he had taken up the torch where the Tory Government dropped it in 1935, he might have built a party! But how on the moon can you create a patriotic party on an anti-patriotic basis?

So, things being as they were, it was a sham Parliament on which I looked down, that day in 1939. Sad that it should have been so, for, if you could have penetrated to these quiet halls, you would have discovered that excellent things were said there, nearly always from the back benches, that there were men in it who can clothe noble thoughts in noble words, who, if they could but break through, would begin to change the things in England that need changing, to restore the things that need restoring.

But, in the lifeless interlude which Parliament had reached — may it be but an interlude — they were wasting their time there, beating the air. The introduction of parliamentary salaries and the creature comforts of that House may have helped to cause this. Too many of these men seemed to think that Parliament was the best club in the world, and that all was for the best in the best of all possible clubs. They were all Little Sir Echoes; their voice came back to themselves. The Press, almost without exception, had ceased to report speeches which deserved to be known to every man and woman in the country. The public, which once took an intelligent interest in the to-and-fro of debate, now hardly knew the names of any of them, apart from those few, like Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Churchill, which had meant something to it in its youth.

The trouble was that the Tory Party machine had become too clever, too efficient. It had destroyed the possibility of an alternative Government. Once in Budapest, but a brief year before the World War was resumed, I dined with one of these Tory M.P.s and, burning as I was with the desire to inform such a man of the urgent dangers that threatened England, I was dismayed beyond measure at his frame of mind. With glee he told of old battles of wits in which 'the Socialists' had been discomfited; he would bet,

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he said with even greater glee, that they would not be returned at the next election or even at the next after that.

War? Peace? The malnutrition of children? The slums? Jerrybuilding? Outworn and detestable class barriers? All these were but meaningless and uninteresting words to this rich, comfortable and quite agreeable man. In 1938, in Budapest, he saw all England in terms of a contest of wits between the Tories and the Socialists; he could not, as I judged, expect to live much more than another ten years, but he was prepared to descend happy into the grave if, when that occurred, the Socialists had still been outwitted.

The Tory Party machine, I saw that day in 1939 from the gallery of the House, had become too perfect. As an instrument of party politics it was a superlative piece of mechanism. From the point of view of a greater patriotism it was a petard which might hoist England (and this remains true as I write in 1941). The Labour Party, still demoralized from the ingenious transaction of 1931 and out of touch with all that part of the younger generation which was not, willy-nilly, organized in the trades unions, did not offer an alternative choice to an electorate, however disillusioned. The Tory Party knew this and, with the disdainful and contemptuous ease of long practice, was content to sit back and pretend to be repelling, in dignified parliamentary form, an Opposition onslaught which was not there.

Only some major social convulsion in this country and Europe, I thought that day, could cleave this stalemate, which was the worst possible thing that could have happened for England, because it destroyed all energy, all will for reform, all enthusiasm, and all hope.

Worse still — and here I must move forward from that day in 1939 to the present, for a moment — the Tory Party, discredited by the appalling failure of its policy but still in possession of all the keys to power, has in its pocket the three-card-trick which might be used if such convulsions come. You think you know exactly what the card is that you choose — ‘Temporary Emergency Regulations’ — but when you turn it over you are apt to find that

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you have picked the wrong one — ‘Tory Class Dictatorship’. Strange, you may think, if after ‘defending freedom with all your might’ and ‘fighting for democracy’ that should be the end of it all! But no, I have shown that, ever since 1914, the result has always been the exact opposite of the promise that was made.

So, before I return to that day in Parliament in 1939, I propose to examine what has happened, since the present war began, to those liberties for which Britons are fighting, and the reasons which were given for the inroads that have been made. These changes, I should add, were made by two Tory Home Secretaries and as I write the amended laws are being most cheerfully administered by a Labour Home Secretary.

First, with few words said in Parliament and seemingly with complete apathy in the country outside it, that right which, I was always taught, was regarded as their most precious birthright by Englishmen for centuries before I was born, has been destroyed: Clause 30 of the Statute to which King John, at Runnymede, put his seal 725 years ago, and which says ‘No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned or outlawed or exiled except by the legal judgment of his peers’.

This freeman’s right was removed by Sir Samuel Hoare, Home Secretary, in the summer of 1939, on the plea that he needed powers of arrest, imprisonment and deportation, at his own discretion, not to further the prosecution of a war against any foreign foe of England, but in order successfully to combat ‘the Irish Republican terrorists’, then busy with bombs in England. In vindication of his plea, Sir Samuel Hoare told Parliament of a mysterious document called ‘Plan S’ — he did not describe it more plainly — in which the terrorists most obligingly expounded their plans. By some means, this had fallen into his hands. He quoted from it this sentence: ‘It must be shown that this is the time to strike, that England has never been in so critical a condition, *barred as she is by political tradition from adopting the only measures that would ensure her strength, namely, totalitarian methods.*’

Sir Samuel Hoare’s Prevention of Violence (Temporary Provisions) Bill quickly showed the Irish terrorists that he was not

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barred by anything at all from adopting the measures they so kindly recommended to him. I hope people who take an intelligent interest in these things, if such exist, will give particular attention to the passage I have italicized.

I have seen such Emergency (Temporary) Measures permanently introduced in many countries, and know the methods used in those cases. In this case the kindest explanation seems to be that Sir Samuel Hoare was hoaxed, that somebody foisted on him a document which should only deceive elderly ladies of both sexes, but not grown men. This much, I think, is certain: if the Irish terrorists were in the habit of communicating with each other by means of mysterious documents, they are most unlikely to have specified, in them, the only means by which the British Government could defeat their aims. If indeed they were so stupid, then the British Government quickly showed them how little they knew it. But this unfortunate 'Plan S' is strongly reminiscent of some of the documents which were produced to convince Germans that they had been Saved From Bolshevism by the measures taken after the Reichstag Fire.

The mysterious document idea is infectious; one Home Secretary is liable to catch it from another. Thus, at the outbreak of war, an Order in Council introduced new 'Regulations' going much further than Sir Samuel Hoare's Bill. Under these new Regulations the new Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson, could do almost anything he liked with His Majesty's subjects.

In the debate about them a new mysterious document turned up. As in the case of the first, no details of its identity, origins or authors were given. Sir John Anderson simply said that 'A certain body which is well known to be Anti-Semitic has given orders to its members that each is to turn himself into a rumour-monger. Regulations made for the public protection are to be made fun of and people who have sent their children to the country are to be encouraged to bring them back. Once this happens, say the instructions, a surprise attack on London may bring the Jews to their knees'. (Members: 'Who said that?' Sir John Anderson: 'I do not intend to give the name of the organization.')



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Such was the justification given in Parliament for the deepest possible incisions in that freedom which is said to be among 'the things' for which we are fighting. I fear it is very typical of the state to which Parliament had come that no serious debate arose from this statement of Sir John Anderson. Of Mysterious Document Number One I said the kindest explanation was that Sir Samuel Hoare had been hoaxed. I can see no explanation for Mysterious Document Number Two. It seems unintelligible and no Parliament justifies its name which lets such a matter pass unchallenged—quite apart from the question whether Regulation 18B, 'whereby a man may be detained and held without trial if he is suspected of actions or intentions hostile to the security of the State', was necessary, as it probably was in war-time.

No amount of perusal can find meaning in Mysterious Document Number Two. How are 'the Jews to be brought to their knees' because 'regulations have been made fun of' and 'children have been brought back from the country' and 'a surprise attack on London has been made'? London is still inhabited by a decreasing, but nevertheless substantial number of native-born non-Jews, and unless the present period of Gentile-baiting takes even fiercer form this is likely to be so for some time to come.

Let me make myself clear. Powers for the authorities quickly to act against people committing, or even 'suspected of' actions hostile to the State are necessary in wartime. They were taken in the last war, and not used in immoderation; they have seemingly not been immoderately used in this. As far as I know, as far as is publicly known, the people to suffer under them to date are Sir Oswald Mosley and several hundred of his followers, and there may well be adequate reason to 'suspect' these of 'actions hostile to the State'.

But, in this statement, which earlier Parliaments would either have thrashed out or died in the attempt, appears the confusion, for the first time, by a Minister of His Majesty's Government, of anti-Semitism with 'actions hostile to the State'.

That is a misleading and dangerous thing. First, the very word

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'anti-Semitism' is meaningless and absurd, as I shall presently show, and must at some time have been thrown into the debate, as I imagine, by an interested party to it who wished to obscure the issue. It should never be used by educated or intelligent people.

There is anti-Gentilism, as expressed in the Hebrew religion, which holds as 'accursed' Jews who marry Gentiles and which leads Jewish parents, as the 'Wills' columns of the British press often enough show, to disinherit their children if they marry Gentiles; and there is the reaction to this enmity, which is anti-Judaism. I, who detest Hitlerism more than any other one thing I know and risked my livelihood to warn my country of its bestial cruelty and implacable designs, am most strongly opposed to anti-Gentilism. Might I, perchance, count among those 'suspected of actions hostile to the State' on this account? This is an important matter, for many reasons, among them the fact that a Jewish multi-millionaire, described as 'the richest man in England', was reported by the Press to have paid £100,000 to the Tory Party's funds, and that he was presumably not unique. An early arrest made under Regulation 18B was that of Captain Ramsay, who as I write lies in Brixton Prison, presumably suspect 'of actions or intentions hostile to the security of the State'.

I never heard of this Tory Member of Parliament until he was arrested, when I inquired about him and gathered that he had been among the most ardent supporters of Mr. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, a thing which would have caused me to dislike him extremely if I had known of him or it.

What he has done, of what he is suspected, whether he was a follower of Sir Oswald Mosley, are things I do not know; nobody knows, save, as I assume, the authorities who had him arrested. Whatever it is they know, they have never made it public.

The thing that attracted my attention to the case of Captain Ramsay is that, while members in all parts of the House in the many months that have elapsed since his arrest have repeatedly raised the most vehement protests against the internment of aliens, no member, save the representative of the constituency in

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which Captain Ramsay apparently lives, seems to have bothered about him or to have urged that the reasons for his arrest if they are so grave, should be made known.

This led me to look up his activities in Parliament prior to his arrest. Like so many other Tory members, like many volcanoes, he seems to have been so seldom active that one might have thought him to be extinct. He may have been seen in the House, but he was very seldom heard.

Indeed, the only recent sign of his activity that I could trace was a question put by him to Sir John Anderson on May 9th, 1940, requesting an assurance that, in the administration of the emergency regulations and in the framing of new ones, 'a distinction should be made between anti-Semitism and pro-Nazism'.

To this Sir John Anderson replied, 'I cannot recognize as relevant the distinction which my honourable and gallant friend seeks to draw'.

Here again is the strange confusion of ideas to which I have drawn attention in the Mysterious Document of which the same Sir John Anderson told the House in presenting his Emergency Regulations. Yet the distinction which Captain Ramsay 'sought to draw' seems to me, whether 'relevant' or 'irrelevant', a very clear one, and if one intention of these Emergency Regulations was that they might be used against native-born British subjects who, while opposed to Hitlerism, were also opposed to anti-Gentilism, this should have been made clear and should now be made clear. It is most important.

Let us follow the history of this affair further. A fortnight later, on May 23rd, 1940 (Mr. Chamberlain had in the meantime resigned) Sir John Anderson informed the House that, in the exercise of his powers under Regulation 18B, he had that day arrested Captain Ramsay, and lodged him in Brixton Prison. Mr. Thorne rose to ask, 'whether the Home Secretary is prepared to give information as to the reason why the honourable and gallant member has been arrested'. The Speaker answered 'Not at this stage'.

In the months that followed the House, as I say, showed the

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most lively and creditable interest in the internment of aliens, and the discussion of the hundreds of questions put about them occupied days of parliamentary time. The imprisonment of British subjects, without trial, was seldom mentioned, and seemingly aroused no interest.

For all I know Members may have had knowledge of Captain Ramsay's activities which satisfied them that his arrest was just; for all I know they may not have had such knowledge; for I do not know. Nothing was ever made public about his offence, if he had committed one. Many months afterwards he appeared, without counsel, before the Committee of Privileges of the House, but this Committee was not invited to investigate the *charges* against him; but only to decide whether his *arrest* was a breach of privilege, in the case of a Member, and it found this was not the case.

The next that was heard of the case — heard, that is, by anybody who subscribes to and reads the parliamentary reports, for the general public heard next to nothing about it — was when the Committee of Privileges met to 'consider its report'.

The account of this debate fills many pages, but I may save any potential reader the trouble of going through them by saying now that he will find in them nothing to indicate what Captain Ramsay did or whether he did anything. True, Mr. Lees-Smith, of Keighley, said:

'We are faced with the fact now that in every democratic country there are sections of persons whose allegiance to a foreign Government is in fact stronger than their allegiance to their own, and in both extremes of politics. That is a problem which we have never had to face before.'

Now, this was getting warm. This touched the crux of the matter. If that was Captain Ramsay's position, he deserved to be put away, and the use of Regulation 18B was well merited in this case. But was it? The same thought occurred to Mr. Maxton of Glasgow, who immediately interjected:

'Is that allegation made against the honourable and gallant gentleman?'

To which Mr. Lees-Smith, however, disappointingly replied: 'I

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cannot deal with an individual', which leaves one still in ignorance of Captain Ramsay's offence, though Mr. Maxton pointed out that: 'It is the only case that we are discussing here to-day.'

The chief word put in for Captain Ramsay in this debate was uttered by Captain Shaw of Forfar, in whose constituency Captain Ramsay lives, and he began with the statement: 'I wish to preface my remarks by pointing out that I am not a member of the Right Club and that I have no sympathy at all with the anti-Jewish doctrines with which the name of Captain Ramsay is associated. I am simply taking an interest in this case because he and his wife happen to be constituents of mine and I therefore think it my duty to do so.'

I have told this brief story of the case of Captain Ramsay, as far as it has developed up to the time that I write, to show that the British Parliament of 1940, though it was jealous for the welfare of interned aliens, never succeeded in elucidating the reason for the imprisonment of one of its Members; that the question whether Captain Ramsay did or was suspected of intending to do anything 'hostile to the State' was only once publicly put, by Mr. Maxton after many months, and then not answered; that this explanation for his arrest, which is the obvious one and surely might be given if it is the fact, has never been given, unless it was given in the private proceedings of the Committee of Privileges; and that through the whole affair runs the unfortunate suggestion, not that he was pro-German, which would mean that he was a traitor, but that he was 'anti-Jewish'.

If Captain Ramsay, in fact, was not only opposed to anti-Gentilism, but was actually sympathetic to anti-British Hitlerism, the fact should be stated.

A truly conscientious British Parliament might have insisted at least on knowing this much. The matter is important because of the unfortunate confusion of ideas which arose from the answer to his question and from references to him. The Jews in many countries, while holding steadfastly to anti-Gentile tenets, have often sought to use power, when they have had it, to introduce legislation against 'anti-Semitism', and that reduces such words as

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'democracy', 'equality' and 'freedom' to absurdity. In Soviet Russia, under predominantly Jewish administrations, 'anti-Semitism' was classed as 'counter-revolutionary' and was made punishable by death!

During the present war Mr. Vladimir Jabotinsky, President of the New Zionist Organization, addressing a mass meeting in New York, demanded the inclusion 'among Allied war aims' of 'an international covenant outlawing anti-Semitism'!

We need to know whither Emergency (Temporary) Regulations lead. I have given a brief outline of the case of Captain Ramsay and put a question, arising from it. The fact that the reason for his arrest was never announced, but that certain insinuations were made, has left room for a confusion which ought to be cleared up.

As I looked at the House, that day in 1939, I saw many faces I knew. There (and in the House of Lords, too) I saw a few men whom I had seen in Berlin, where, to the angry disgust of myself and my colleagues, they had hobnobbed with the Nazi leaders, and gone about saying that the British newspaper correspondents, who sought to inform opinion at home, were 'Reds' and 'extreme anti-Nazis'. Soon these same men, who were so indifferent to the things we told them about concentration camps, were to orate about 'our fight for civilization'.

In one corner I saw a Tory member who had asked me, in Berlin in the autumn of 1933, 'What do you think Hitler means, in a few words?' and I said, 'War within five years'. And in another seat I saw Sir Arnold Wilson, who had been a particular thorn in our sides in those days, because of his incorrigible faith in Hitler's well-meaningness. I remembered how he had come into my office in Berlin one day and shown me a box of a hundred English cigarettes, which he had been allowed to bring through the customs without demur. 'If that's typical of the new regime,' he had said, jovially, 'I'm all for it', and I, stung to disgust by this remark, because of the things I knew to be happening all round us at that time, made the bitterest retort I could think of, to affront him, so that, red with anger, he wheeled round and walked out.

Yet this same Sir Arnold Wilson, though he was over fifty when

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the present war began, said, 'Once I am convinced that the issue between Germany and England must be fought to a finish, as I am now convinced, I have no desire whatever to shelter myself and live in safety behind the ramparts of the bodies of millions of our young men', and he managed to get into the Royal Air Force as a gunner (he must have had enormous influence) and flew away and was killed.

That was a man, and an Englishman. He was honestly and honourably mistaken and the manner of his death is a solace and an inspiration. He had probably long since forgotten what I said to him in Berlin, but I wish I could have seen him before he went to take it back. Tragic that the British Parliament, at such a low ebb in its fortunes, should lose such men as he and Cartland. I only hope that when this war is over it may be reinvigorated by the entry of large numbers of the men now serving in the Navy, Army and Air Force.

From my perch in the gallery I saw Winston Churchill, still champing in opposition, and shook my head in despair, for I knew this was the man we should have to have. As I looked at the shadowy figures on the Government bench I thought of the real leaders of the past, men who seemed, at least, to have real roots in England, and not only in dividends — Wellington, Palmerston, Gladstone.

My eyes wandered to the women members. There was Lady Astor, the American-born lady whom so many believe to be the first woman member of the British Parliament, wrongly, I fancy, because that pride of place belongs to an Irish lady who married a Polish count. Lady Astor was discoursing about unmarried mothers. Ah me, I thought dreamily, now I know why they say the female of the speeches is more deadly than the male.

I wondered, looking down, what was this sinister influence that the House seemed to exert upon all who entered it. Once in the arms of the Mother of Parliaments, and they seemed to go into a kind of trance. There was Vernon Bartlett, swept into Parliament on a wave of indignant protest against the dishonourable surrender of Munich. The voice of England, we had thought, was making

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itself heard, belatedly but clearly. But one of Mr. Chamberlain's Ministers had blandly remarked that a few months in Parliament had a very sobering effect on ardent spirits, and indeed Vernon Bartlett's proved to be but a very still small voice. Perhaps the hope of 'catching the Speaker's eye', from long deferment, maketh the heart sick.

There's Kirkwood, the Socialist, I thought. That fiery man, surely I remember him, years ago, proclaiming that he and his friends would 'smash the atmosphere' when they got into this House. Well, they've been here long enough now, and have only beaten the air. They have neither made England better (sorry, Scotland) nor have they prevented this war that is coming. Plague take them, I thought, can't they see any further than their noses, all of them?

I looked at A. P. Herbert, once a great reformer, who had seen that the divorce laws were obscene and the licensing laws absurd. But now, I thought, the only thing that seems really to sting him is the suggestion that anything is wrong with Parliament — this Parliament! Indeed, I think I was not unjust in this case, for later, when the war had begun again, A.P.H. wrote fierce odes in defence of Mr. Chamberlain ('Hell hath no fury like a Neville scorned') and Sir John Anderson in a Sunday paper.

But he was and is, none the less, one of our greatest humorists as he proved when he invited Mr. J. B. Priestley, who thought to see that certain things were wrong in England and needing putting right, to go into Parliament and put them right from there! This reminded me very strongly of another famous Punch figure who, looking out from the institution in which he was confined and seeing an angler fishing from a river bank, asked how long he had been there and what he had caught, and on receiving the answer 'Five hours' and 'Nothing', said 'Come inside'.

But on that day in 1939 I thought that possibly the most typical of all the men I saw below, in this Parliament, was Mr. R. A. Butler, at whose parliamentary performance I had long marvelled. He, as I had observed at the time of the Abyssinian, Spanish, Austrian, Czechoslovak and other episodes, was the greatest of the



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pastmasters in the use of the affirmative, the negative and the evasive. A fair, and even beautiful example of his art is the answer he once gave to a question about the bombardment of Gibraltar by French forces: 'There was a certain incident and we have given a certain answer.'

Not one Englishman in a hundred streets or a thousand air-raid-shelters, I suppose, knows anything of this great family of Butlers, the members of which, for some reason, are born with a silver spoon marked 'office' in their mouths. No House is complete without its Butler.

The main function of this one, as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, was to give no information in reply to the most probing question, and he fulfilled this with amazing skill. His talent may rank among the lesser arts, but he was a master of it, and the anonymous author of a book called *Right Honourable Gentlemen* described him in such phrases as these: 'Mr. R. A. Butler is not handicapped by genius, originality or emotion . . . He is an ideally efficient Minister, industrious, full of accurate information which he is too cautious to divulge, and immune from warmth. He has drifted steadily forward with uninterrupted success . . . Eden in the same office presumed by his depth of feeling and clearness of vision substantially to affect policy; Butler is incapable of such presumption. He possesses the great advantage of a clear voice; when he is once again allowed to say something of importance everybody will be able to hear.'

I remember once, in the German Reichstag, a Chancellor whose Cabinet was composed of the homeliest-featured group of men I have ever seen. It was Dr. Brüning. He defended them against criticisms of their efficiency by stretching an all-embracing arm in the direction of his unglamorous colleagues, who sat in a solemn, owl-like row alongside him, and exclaiming, 'Of course, I admit that my Government has *Schönheitsfehler*'. The word, I think, is as accurately translated by 'shortcomings of beauty' as by 'blemishes'.

That day in 1939 in the gallery of the House of Commons, I was able to satisfy myself of the flawless physical beauty of the ornaments of our Front Bench. But as I contemplated Mr. Butler and

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listened to his replies I felt that he was ideally representative of the frame-of-mind, of the inner-man, that have developed in England since the deplorable discovery of coal and the regrettable blooming of the public schools, where humbugging-with-words seems to be taught as a virtue in itself, only second to proficiency in golf.

I exercised my unruly fancy with a mental picture of Mr. Butler, in his place at Question Time, on the occasion of a famous historical event 1939 years before:

Mr. Workshop:

Can the Prime Minister say if the Government has received from its representative at Jerusalem a report on the execution there by crucifixion of a highly-respected Nazarene leader of democratic and liberal views?

Mr. Butler:

The answer is in the affirmative.

Mr. Anvil:

Can the Prime Minister tell us the contents of this report?

Mr. Butler:

The answer is in the negative.

Mr. Foundry:

Must this answer be taken to mean that the report confirms the accounts of the execution which have appeared in the press?

Mr. Butler:

I cannot add anything to my answer to the previous question.

Prof. Theory:

Does the report of H.M. representative confirm the account given by the Jerusalem Correspondent of *The Times*?

Mr. Butler:

I have not closely studied the account published in *The Times* but my impression is that substantial differences exist.

Mr. Workshop:

Can we be told what these differences are?

Mr. Butler:

This question was answered by my answer to the second question.

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Mr. Anvil:

Is it not a fact that this execution was carried out in the most barbarous manner, that the property of this unfortunate democratic leader was divided between the soldiers of a foreign power after the execution, and will the Prime Minister cause representations to be made to the Fascist Roman Government in this matter?

Mr. Butler:

The answer to the first and second parts of the question is covered by my answer to the last question but four; as to the last part of the question, it is common knowledge that there has been intervention in Palestine from several quarters, and it would be most improper for H.M. Government to usurp the functions of the Non-Intervention Committee, which is now sitting.

Mr. Solomon:

Is it not apparent that honourable members are trying to introduce an anti-Semitic element into this matter by the form of their questions?

Mr. Butler:

It is not my place to impute motives to honourable members, but any such tendency, if it were present, would be most deeply deprecated, indeed deplored, by H.M. Government.

Col. Diehard:

Is it not a fact that this man was a notorious agitator and Red, and will the Prime Minister note that the feeling of the House is against anything that would embarrass the Roman Government in its selfless effort to save Palestine for the Palestinians?

Mr. Butler:

I cannot express an opinion in regard to the first part of the question, but H.M. Government of course attach the greatest importance to the maintenance of friendly relations with all powers with which H.M. Government enjoys friendly relations.

And so on.

Yet later, when the present war had begun, this same Mr.

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Butler made a most excellent broadcast speech about foreign policy, after the war, and the domestic state of England, after the war, which showed that his ideals, of a well-informed foreign policy resolutely pursued and an England where greater opportunity and social equality should prevail, are those which the most fervent patriot could only share. May he be of like mind when the war is over and contribute to the achievement of that better state of affairs.

I came away from Parliament, that day in 1939, abysmally depressed in spirit. Now, in 1941, when the thing I then feared and had so long seen coming has long been upon us and we have begun to fight it off and know that we are going to overcome it, now it is difficult to recapture that mood of black despair induced by contemplation of the House of Commons. But on that day it was very real.

What hope is there for us, for England, I asked myself, as I came away, when our fate is in the hands of this somnolent, ignorant, aged and irresolute assembly?

I walked despondently up Whitehall. It was June of 1939. People whom I had held to be my friends had been asking me, about this time, 'Why don't you go into Parliament?' Now, as I came away, I thought they must be, not my friends, but my enemies, wolves in sheep's clothing. For who but an ill-wisher, I thought, would wish a man the fate worse than death — to go to Westminster and never be heard of again?

## CHAPTER 4

### FREE PRESS

WHEN I returned to England, after so many years abroad, one of my first tasks was to make a study of the British Press, of which, in these years, I had been a foreign correspondent, for the most part in Germany.

When I began my association with it, those many years before, I had unquestioningly accepted the dogma that it was a 'free press', and had taken a personal pride in that status, for I could not then conceive, and cannot to-day conceive, of any more useful service that a man could perform for his countrymen than truthfully and accurately to inform them about other countries.

When I came home a change had occurred in my opinion, in this as in so many other matters, for I saw that, with war but a few weeks or months distant, most of the newspapers were derisively scouting the idea that war might come, and I knew that this optimism was in flagrant contradiction of the information which any experienced newspaper correspondent in Berlin would have given his editor; I knew, indeed, that with hardly an exception every experienced newspaper correspondent in Berlin, from the moment that Hitler came to power, had sent home warning after warning, month by month and year by year, that war would be inevitable unless Britain prevented it, and had repeatedly given chapter and verse for his warnings.

The picture of the British Press, as I saw it when I came home, was thus quite different from the truth as I knew it, and thus the phrase about 'a free press' seemed to me to have lost meaning, for it can only have meaning and value if the press is free to tell the truth. Freedom to publish irresponsible chatter is not freedom at all, but the negation of freedom.

To-day, when the tap of war has been turned on full again, you hear a deal about 'the things we are fighting for'. It is a convenient

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phrase, useful for gulling the kind of people who were gulled by a Zinovieff Letter or a Reichstag Fire. I can tell you what we are fighting for — our lives, for life under German rule would be death.

But if any man of inquiring mind should ever ask, 'What, then, are these "things" that we are fighting for?' he would probably find that the answer, returned after a baffled pause for reflection, included 'the freedom of the press'. Yet I can say that, in the momentous years which led to the resumption of this war, there was much more freedom for irresponsible or suborned men to misinform the public than there was for conscientious writers to inform that public.

The power of the press, indeed, was more a power to bamboozle than to instruct, and, added to the inborn love of many people for a boggy-man, it was largely responsible for the mental twilight in which the burghers lived.

In former times, newspapers were conducted by independent editors, excellently-informed men of proven judgment, whose authority in their offices was as unchallenged as that of a captain on the bridge of his ship. If the owner tried to interfere with navigation, he might be put in irons.

To-day nearly all newspapers are the mouthpieces of very rich men, who may override their editors and specialists whenever they get a bee in their bonnets. They may suddenly decide, for instance, that Hitler is good for dividends, that Hitler will save them from Bolshevism, that anything said against Hitler is 'bad for business'. Their profits derive to-day, no longer from the public, since the cost of printing modern newspapers is greater than the price charged, because so many extra pages are needed for advertisements, but from the advertisers. The advertisers, too, may be wont to hint that 'business will suffer' if any paper should hint, for instance, that Hitler is preparing for war. Or the owner may get some other, quite incalculable fad — Standard Bread, The Daily Mail Hat, Justice for Hungary, or what you will — and the highly specialized staff of the newspaper is sent tearing round in circles after this ridiculous stuffed rabbit.

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Such a case was that of Lord Rothermere, who stated, in the lawsuit in which he was defendant after the present war had begun, that for several years after Hitler came to power he was convinced that this man wanted peace and that he made the *Daily Mail*, against the judgment of that newspaper's professional staff, present this view and adjust its German news and views to it. (This was the lawsuit in which counsel for the plaintiff, the 'Non-Aryan' lady originating in Vienna who maintained that her services as an intermediary had not been sufficiently requited, quoted from a letter written by Hitler's aide-de-camp and confidant, Captain Wiedemann, the following passage, suppressed by nearly all British newspapers: 'You know, my Lord, that the Führer greatly appreciates the work that the Princess did to straighten relations between our countries. The work was done, and this the Princess never ceased to repeat, on your behalf and on your instructions. That it was done by her with great ability, astuteness and tact, you surely know. You surely know, too, that the Princess last May, with your assistance, started negotiations with Lord Halifax and it was her groundwork that made the Munich agreement possible.')

Lord Rothermere was entitled to his own opinion; but it was the opinion of an amateur, moved by irrelevant considerations, and his experienced editors and foreign correspondents, who knew the subject, could have told him that he was wrong. But as he himself stated in the witness-box, they were overridden by the owner, who was not a skilled navigator in foreign political waters. The information given to the public accordingly suffered. If this is 'the freedom of the press' it is no freedom.

Lord Rothermere's case is a sad and a strange one, for he is typical of the very rich man who greatly feared the coming of a new war and, from obsession with the Red Bogy, used the power he had to promote that very policy — the propitiation of Hitler — which was bound to make it inevitable.

In a very acrid and acerbious dispute which he once had with Mr. Baldwin, that politician spoke contemptuously of people whom he would not have 'on his doorstep' and said that in the event of war Lord Rothermere would be among those who would quickly

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withdraw to the Riviera. Lord Rothermere had indeed great possessions in that part of France, which he moved to another part when the unfortunate development of the war made the Riviera less secluded than it had always been in such emergencies, but even in their new home they were not spared by the tide of war. Lord Rothermere himself, when the war came, was sent to the United States, on a special mission, by his colleague Lord Beaverbrook, who had become Minister of Aircraft Production, and this special mission had taken him to the pleasant island of Bermuda, where he had acquired 52 acres of land, when he was overtaken by an enemy from whom there is no escape.

It is a sad story, and goes to prove my contention, already mentioned in this book, that nothing is wasted in such prodigious quantities as fear, in this world, for the things we fear are seldom those which ultimately befall us, but the consequences of our fear, for others, may be very grave.

In any case, 'the freedom of the press', in the conditions that prevailed about the time I returned to England, was a phrase that was used thousands of times daily but had little relation to the facts. If the skilled men were gagged or made to write things they did not believe, what freedom was that? The freedom of rich men to pursue their fads and fancies, to grind their axes?

Let me quote the following succession of utterances from a single newspaper:

It is useless to say that war will not come. Nothing can save us from the new conflict in Europe. September 1932.

What is all this talk about war? There is not going to be any war, so far as Britain is concerned. There is no chance of it at all. What is going to make us fight? Not the Polish Corridor. October 1933.

We are marching in the direction of war. September 1935.

We make bold to predict that there will be no European war involving this country for years to come. March 1938.

The Germans will not seize Czechoslovakia. May 1938.



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There will be no European war. September 1938.

The Dominions will not participate in territorial disputes and boundary demarcations in Central Europe. October 1938.

There will be no war; that is, no European war involving first-class powers . . . Europe will have peace for years to come. December 1938.

There is no reason for war in Europe. And there is every prospect of peace in days to come. January 1939.

I do not believe that there will be war in Europe. August 1939.

Under this system, in England on the eve of the World War resumed, the British Press, with a few exceptions, played Pied Piper to the British masses; led them, infantile and trusting, up everything-is-lovely alley; pushed them over the precipice of war. The few journals that consistently and step-by-step traced the development leading to war and consistently warned the public of what must come were in the main those of smaller circulation and blunted their warning by over-stressing the Jewish theme; they made their readers feel that not the fate of England, Britain and the British Empire was at stake, as was the case, but that they should spring to arms to reinstate Jewish film-stars and doctors in their places in Berlin. Thus they, too, exposed themselves to the suspicion that, in a different sense, they were grinding some particular axe or pursuing some private fad.

The most fantastic feats of exaggeration were performed in this field; to them belong the titles 'The annihilation of German Jewry' (printed above an article in the *Spectator*) and 'The Extermination of the Jews in Germany' (given to a book which carried an introduction by the Bishop of Durham). I should like anybody with a memory to bear these titles in mind and recall them when this war is over; he will find that the Jews in Germany have neither been annihilated nor exterminated, but that the great majority of them are still there, trading and practising, and I shall be glad in about five years from now, if anybody is still interested, to substantiate this statement with chapter and verse.

That which is exaggerated is not true, and the constant exaggeration of the actual situation of the Jews in Germany, over a period of years, did much to cloud the minds of the readers of this section of the British Press to the real and the greater danger — which was to Britain and the British Empire.

I suppose no man ever loved the profession of news-gathering and news-reporting more than I did, and the hardest decision of my life was to relinquish a post I had worked hard to obtain and fill because I felt that I could not get my knowledge through to the reader. Knowing what I did, my daily perusal of the press in England on the eve of war, when I had returned to this country, was a dire penance, a scourging of my soul. One newspaper, right up to the actual outbreak of war, kept up a daily parrot-cry of 'No war!' always pausing one day to remark how right it had been the day before.

Another, in the days immediately leading to war, gradually modulated the peace-in-our-time crescendo of its flaring front-page headlines in this way: 'Peace is to-day's big news'; 'No war is *again* the big news to-day'; 'That confident smile!' (this an interpretatory allusion to a picture of Mr. Chamberlain, beaming); 'War scare subsiding'; 'Tension no worse to-day' (a masterpiece, this); 'War'.

Another wrote, on the eve of hostilities: 'There is no need to be alarmist about the future, no need to anticipate circumstances in which we might be involved in a quarrel with Germany. It is a possibility which in itself we need hardly consider at all. If we did consider it, we might conceivably come to the conclusion that such circumstances were unlikely ever to arise.'

The men who operated these newspapers have at least the excuse that the Government was saying the same things. As to that, I can say of my own knowledge and experience that if the Government really believed what it said, that Hitler could be appeased and peace saved by the course it took, it was the only Government in all Europe that believed this.

'Freedom of the press' could and can mean a great deal, if the phrase be honoured in the observance and not in the breach. It

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could have meant the avoidance of this war. As proof I have quoted, earlier in this book, the exact forecast of Hitler's intentions, and of the date of the war, written by Norman Ebbutt, Berlin Correspondent of *The Times*, in April 1933, ten weeks after Hitler's advent to power. And he was but one of many.

The profession of journalism abroad is, or could be, a most honourable craft and one of the most useful callings, in the service of the nation, that can be imagined. But in the years following 1933 it became more and more difficult for British reporters abroad to say such things as this which I have quoted from Ebbutt.

Some were actually forbidden to say them. Others received broad hints, explicit or implicit, not to 'labour' the shadow-side of National Socialism — though, of course, they must tell the truth, that was what they were employed and paid for! Others were vilified and victimized. Others again were treated with bored disdain. In time their voices were stilled altogether in the clamour of Ministers, peers, millionaires, lady explorers, ambassadors, romantic novelists, and others who saw so clearly that they were biased against Hitler, that the man only needed to be treated nicely for all to be well. If these men kept on writing things that were not published, suffering expulsion, jeopardizing hard-won livelihoods, it was because they saw at the end of it all the flames of London burning, the destruction of British homes, even a world reverting to jungle-rule.

It was all vain, at that time, England could not be roused, because England feared nothing save one thing — the necessity for exertion. In the pavilion at Lord's an influential voice was heard murmuring that there would have been none of this trouble if only Hitler had played cricket.

In darkest Leicestershire a master of hounds lamented that the dictators never came out with the Pytchley, where they would have got 'a better idea of the meaning of real friendship' — an inspiring thought, as all will agree who have heard the hunting-men, as they take their fences, soberly discussing the injustice done to the Czechs at Munich, the urgent need for the cleansing of the British slums, the regrettable lack of real friendship for the people

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who decay in the derelict areas, and the hard lot of the friendless fox. The only difference of opinion, indeed, was whether Hitler, to have been a kinder and a Godlier man, should have killed fish, flesh or fowl, or about the kind of ball he should have played with to have been less implacable in his cruelties. For later, when the war had begun the President of the Barnstaple Bowling Club opined that Hitler might have been a different sort of man if he had been a bowler — he might have been less biased.

The Press could be great and useful if it were the product of trained and independent editors, foreign editors, correspondents abroad and home reporters, but when these specialized craftsmen become the captives of rich-men-in-a-panic, rich-men-with-a-fad, rich-men-with-a-blonde, party-made-peers and 'the advertisers', the result is an odious brew.

I know of one journalist who, having to write something about a peer-in-the-news, mentioned quite soberly that his grandfather had been a Rumanian pedlar. The brother-peer who was this reporter's lord and master gave instructions that he was never to write another word in the newspaper and he received notice.

The picture of some London newspapers, as I saw them when I came back to England, was depressing to a man who thought that journalism ought to be one of the highest callings in the land. They imitated each other's tricks, and none of these tricks was worth imitating.

Each had to have its sob-sister, a lady who produced to order articles ('If Only Hitler Had Had A Little Daughter') which were supposed to wring the withers of the woman reader; a snob-sister, Lady Hysteria Pinmondeley, perhaps, who gave them peeps of high life, and whose uncle, by strange chance, might have had something to do with the peerage achieved by the newspaper's proprietor; a soft-boiled uplifter, a young man who saw The Good In Everything and made his readers feel as if they were being dandled on his knee in a Sunday School; a hard-boiled debunker who wrote in a fierce, they-can't-muzzle-me vein about political and other rackets which throve and prospered in seeming ignorance of his intrepid, truth-at-any-price attacks on them; a

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tame peer; a tame member of parliament; a tame clergyman; a music hall comedian; and so on.

All these queer people worked within a circle circumscribed by The Things That Must Not Be Said; they had to divine the favourite inhibitions of The Lord, their proprietor, and succeeded in this unerringly. In a corner, neglected, downtrodden, unimportant, harassed, and busy, you might see a few careworn-looking men who seemed sensible of their presumption in being there at all; these were the journalists, men who could only write simply and well and had specialized knowledge of various subjects.

This plight of the British Press is a dangerous thing at a time when the Hitler-Is-Misunderstood racket, true, has been exploded, but the real issues behind the war to which it led are still not clear and powerful interests may at any time desire that the British public should be bamboozled again.

I have shown some of the more important aspects of English life as they looked to a man who had watched war brewing abroad and then returned, on the eve of that war, to study them close up. The cry to-day is 'No recriminations' and 'The past must wait'. These are the voices of anti-patriots, because these things will be important after the World War (Second Instalment) as they were before it came about, and because they could quite well lead to a third instalment, which would be more than too much.

## CHAPTER 5

### AND THERE THE JEWS!

A PROVOKING thought: if Rupert Brooke, whose poetry, as Lord Halifax said in his 'This is a conflict of youth against youth' speech, so inspired the generation of 1914, if this Rupert Brooke had not died, with about a million other Britishers, in the 1914-18 section of the war which has now been resumed, he would have needed to revise the poem he wrote at the Café des Westens, in the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin, in 1912. He wrote that poem sitting at the same table with a friend of mine, Rothay Reynolds, who in the years between the two sections of the World War struggled hard to fulfil the difficult task of being Berlin Correspondent of Lord Rothermere's *Daily Mail*, and when Rupert Brooke had finished he turned to Rothay Reynolds and said, 'I have made this café famous', which was true.

I well remember how that song of England wrung an Englishman's heart, that is, the heart of a very young and fervent Englishman, who took on trust nearly everything he was told about his native country, of which he had seen but little, in the 1914-18 war. But if Rupert Brooke had lived in 1939, or thereabouts, he would have found himself out of touch with the taste of the times. For his poem, 'Grantchester,' begins:

*Du lieber Gott!*

Here am I, sweating, sick and hot,  
And there the shadowed waters fresh  
Lean up to embrace the naked flesh.

*Temperamentvoll* German jews  
Drink beer around — and there the dewes . . .

Well, well, well. How times have changed. Rupert Brooke is dead; the war-to-end-war has gone and the war-to-continue-war is simmering nicely; but the relative position of Jews and dewes

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seems to have been reversed, or have we now both? Rupert Brooke, the singer of the generation of 1914, seemed to find the Jews of Berlin a thought unsympathetic and none took it amiss of him that he said so; indeed, the thought of those temperamental beer-drinking Jews in Berlin helped to fortify the faith of the young Englishman of 1914 in 'the things he was fighting for'. Now we, he thought, have dewes, and we are going to keep them.

But if Rupert Brooke had written twenty-five years later he would have known that those two lines must come out, or else he would have had to find a fresh rhyme for dewes, for by the time the World War in which he died was resumed no Englishman of his class and kind would have thought of writing anything which would set the critics yelping the dread name 'anti-Semite'.

By the time the World War was resumed, indeed, the general understanding had come to be that the Jews of Berlin were the most valuable citizens of that town and that we were very lucky indeed to have them, because they were so much cleverer than ourselves. By some further process of reasoning which was a little outside my comprehension, the general understanding seemed also to be that we should fight Germany to enable these people, whom we had been fortunate enough to obtain, to return there as soon as possible; this, as far as I could gather, was among 'the things' we were about to fight for.

When I returned to England, on the eve of the new war which had become almost inevitable, I brought back with me a particular interest in this question, because for many years, since 1933, I had noticed, with growing misgiving, that, chiefly through the very great influence which the Jews in all countries exercised in the interest of their co-religionists, this relatively small aspect of an enormous problem was being set out of all proportion to the whole, that the entire wood was disappearing behind one tree.

It was patent that the number of Jews who would suffer from Hitlerism would never be more than a very small fraction of the entire number of sufferers; Czechs, Poles, Danes, Norwegians, Hollanders, Belgians, Frenchmen and Britishers, I knew, would suffer and die in thousands, if not millions, because of Hitler,

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and yet the sufferings of the Jews, through the power wielded by other Jews over the press, the films and the stage, were presented as the greatest and most terrible thing in all this stupendous tragedy.

The film, 'The Great Dictator', produced by Charles Chaplin in peaceful Hollywood is a case in point. The ignorant and credulous seeing this astute production, which is half first-class humour and half very subtle propaganda, would gain the impression, similarly conveyed by many other films sent out from the same source, that the only people who suffered ill-treatment in Germany were the Jews, and that the Nazi Storm Troopers spent their entire time beating them up. Yet the number of Jews who suffered ill-treatment in Germany, save for the one violent outbreak in November 1938 when a Nazi diplomat was murdered in Paris by a young Jew, was never more than a small fraction of the whole; the great bulk of victims and martyrs was composed of German non-Jews and of non-Jews in the countries overrun by Hitler.

Further, I seemed to see, as I watched the great movement of Jews from Germany to Britain and the British Dominions (many of them Jews who had come from Eastern Europe to Germany during the last war), that the mass of compassion mobilized by the great publicity machine at their disposal was being exploited to gain them employment, in large numbers, in countries whose men would soon be going off to war, and, with the picture of Berlin after the war of 1914-18 in my mind, I greatly feared this development.

For the Jews as I had seen them in many European countries in those between-war years of full Jewish emancipation and freedom in no way resembled the Ghetto-community of benevolent, mankind-loving people who only wished to be left in peace and poverty that was shown in the Chaplin film (incidentally, there were no ghettos in Germany). Rather had I found them, when all the gates of opportunity were opened wide to them, to practise that very doctrine which they so reviled and detested when it was turned against them by Hitler — discrimination. Discrimination against Gentiles.



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In the trades and industries and professions to which they penetrated, and ultimately controlled through the power of finance, they were most resolute in the progressive exclusion of Gentiles by methods of extremely ruthless inter-collaboration. The figures are available and are irrefutable; such a state of affairs could not have come about by accident.

Moreover, this seemed to me quite natural, for it accorded with the teaching of the Jewish faith. And this seemed to me to be at once the weakest and the crucial point in the Jewish case, and one which all their champions and apologists implacably ignored, merely yelping in answer to it, 'Anti-Semite'; that their religion was one of discrimination. The anti-Jewish teaching of National Socialism was but the direct inversion of the anti-Gentile teaching of the Hebrew religion, and this statement of the case cannot be refuted; it never is refuted, but is always ignored.

The Jews did not put their doctrines into practice through the medium of the concentration camp — they could not, because they were always numerically too weak in any particular country physically to subdue the majority. They used another medium — money and the power it gives, which can be enormously powerful in the hands even of a small minority if that minority is compact enough and if all its members understand the great idea.

So much for the brief background to the Jewish question which an Englishman brought with him to England after many years in Germany and in other parts of Europe. Before I tell of what I saw in this country I want to kill some of the more meaningless phrases which are in current use, even by persons reputed to be of the highest education and intellect, in this controversy.

The first is 'anti-Semitism'. The word is used every day by millions of people who have read or heard it somewhere and have no notion what it means. On such a basis of ignorance do great debates proceed. The power, so strangely wielded, of the Press and film to-day is so great that you need only to shout this word long and loud enough at the credulous masses for them to think that it is something akin to rabies or leprosy; that is probably why it was coined and thrown into the discussion.

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As far as I know 'Semite' is a word describing a member of any one of a number of Mediterranean or Near Eastern races, for instance, the Turks, Moors, Arabs and Abyssinians, among others. I have nothing whatever against Abyssinians, Arabs, Moors and Turks, because they are never likely to harm me, though I should have been strongly opposed to the Turks at the time when they sought to impose their religion of discrimination against the Gentile peoples they had conquered in Europe. I should probably have joined a Crusade against them, which means, as I believe, a campaign, waged under the sign of the cross, against a religion of discrimination. For the same reason I am ready to join a crusade of words against any other religion of discrimination which, as I think, pursues ends of discrimination while seeking always to conceal this fact. I see no difference in this respect between National Socialism and Judaism save that National Socialism has eighty million bayonets and Judaism has a lot of money.

So that of 'anti-Semitism', a word uttered so many millions of times in recent years, you may say that there ain't no such a thing, and you have been fooled, for want of examining the words you use. There is anti-Gentilism; and there is its reaction, anti-Judaism. I have several interesting letters from Jews who endorse this statement of the position.

The other lunatic phrase which parties to this discussion, and allegedly learned parties at that, are wont to throw into it is 'racial discrimination'. In a debate in Parliament about new regulations issued by the British Government to restrict sales of land by Arabs to Jews in Palestine (an extremely important debate this, of which I shall speak again) one of the stoutest parliamentary champions of the Jewish cause, a Mr. Noel-Baker, fiercely attacked this 'discrimination on racial grounds'.

The Jews and the Arabs are of the same race; both are Semitic. If debates in Parliament about the Jewish question are carried on at this level, they are of little value, and the representatives of English constituencies where a deal needs putting right would do better to begin at home.

When I returned to England my eyes told me, as I wandered

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about London, that the number of Jews who had come to this country was very great. I knew that before, because I had seen many of them depart, from various countries, but how many were there?

This is a question to which not even the most diligent research gives more than an approximate answer. As the untutored African negro said, there are one, two, three, a great many. The number of aliens 'registered with the police' in October 1939, according to Sir John Anderson, was 238,074, and of these some 150,000 were nominally of German, Austrian, Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Polish and Russian nationality, which means that the great majority of them were Jews. The bulk of these, again, were newcomers.

But the number of these people 'registered with the police' gives little clue to the number who are actually here, for, from the very meagre records of recent proceedings in our police courts, I have kept notes of:

An Austrian Jew who, when he was detected by the police, was 'making a profit of £16 a week from a greengrocery business at Leeds and had been in England since 1937, when he landed from a Belgian fishing-boat';

A Russian Jew who was charged at Old Street with failing 'in or about 1916' to report a change of address to the police. From 1916 to 1940 he had been in England unknown to the authorities! Asked where he had been since 1916 he said, 'I have been out of work and could not come to report as I had no money'!

A German Jew, who was supposed to have come to England in 1933 and left again in 1934, but in 1940 was discovered to be living here under the name of a British soldier killed in 1917 whose name appeared on a war memorial in a Sussex village; counsel for this man said he had obtained a copy of the dead soldier's birth certificate 'thinking it was probably himself'!

A Polish Jew who came to England in 1931 and was warned to leave in 1932; discovered in 1939, he had been living in this country for seven years unknown to the authorities!

Two Polish Jewish rabbis who were convicted of harbouring ten

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German Jews, nine Austrian Jews and nine stateless Jews without registering them with the police!

And so on.

The number of these newcomers to England, therefore, is a thing to guess about. What happens to them? The poorer ones, as I have shown, 'open a greengrocery business at Leeds', or go to staff those secret workshops of lowly-paid garment workers, in Bethnal Green, Hendon, Golders Green and Willesden which have sometimes received casual mention in the London Press, which defy discovery by the inspectors sent out under the Factory Acts (designed to protect workers), and supply cheap refugee labour to the price-cutting tailors.

This group of hidden refugees represents a threat to native labour.

But what happens to the thousands 'registered with the police'? In respect of these the promise was 'repeatedly given' before the present war (to quote a reminder to Sir John Anderson from Mr. Raikes) 'that they would be admitted for temporary refuge pending re-emigration'. After the outbreak of the war, which was not difficult to foresee, Sir John Anderson stated that in fact they would not, save possibly in 'individual cases', re-emigrate, but would stay in this country, where their services would be 'utilized in ways which will be advantageous to the national effort and will not conflict with the interests of British subjects'.

Thus was the principle established that these thousands of newcomers, who had come to England as transmigrants, should remain here and be allowed to take employment, always under the provision that this should not 'conflict with the interests of British subjects' — a provision I shall subsequently discuss. But what of their maintenance in England?

No charge under this head was to have fallen on the British taxpayer. This was another of the oft-proclaimed safeguards, like those about re-emigration and non-employment, under which their original admission to this country had been allowed. In each case some 'individual' had guaranteed to be responsible for their maintenance, but by October 1939 Sir John Anderson

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announced that these guarantees had been given, not to the Government, but to 'certain voluntary organizations' (in practice, this meant almost entirely Jewish organizations). Only these voluntary organizations, said Sir John Anderson, could enforce the guarantees, and these organizations were satisfied that 'in some cases the guarantor ought to be released of his obligation'. In those cases the voluntary organizations would undertake the whole responsibility for the care of the refugee from their own funds.

By February of 1940, however, the Government had decided that the 'voluntary organizations' could not bear the burden which private guarantors had originally pledged themselves to bear and asked the approval of Parliament for a grant of £100,000 to these organizations, to cover the period from September to December 1939, and of £1 for every £1 spent by these organizations thereafter, up to a total of £27,000 a month.

Time then marched on, and by November of 1940 the Government announced that the 'voluntary organizations' had actually received £430,000 up to the end of September 1940, that a further £375,000 was required to carry them over until April 1941, and that the Government would in future pay '100 per cent' (which means all) of the amounts expended on the maintenance of refugees, as well as 75 per cent of the administration expenses.

Thus, by this time both the original 'private guarantors' and the 'voluntary organizations' had been relieved of financial responsibility for the refugees, which devolved upon the British taxpayer; the number of the refugees, as is shown by the cases I have quoted, was problematical; and they were entitled, with the permission of the Ministry of Labour, to take employment at a time when the entire young manhood of the country had been called up for military service.

I have given this brief sketch so that a few people, at least, may gain some idea of the position of the Jewish immigrants to this country. There are a very large number of them. Very few of them, now, will ever leave again. The British taxpayer cares for them. In practice they seem to enjoy greater privileges than the

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native inhabitant, since they are ineligible for military service and will therefore presumably survive the war, while they are eligible for employment, which is easy to obtain when all the young men of this country have been called away, and when they take this it is called 'helping the national war effort', whereas if John Smith gets a job that is just called getting a job.

To have achieved so fair a deal as this, they must quite clearly have had the support of very powerful forces indeed.

I have shown that the several safeguards attached to their entry to the country have all proved illusory, and the solid-sounding promise that they would only be allowed to take employment if this 'does not conflict with the interests of British citizens' subsequently proved just as illusory. For one thing, the British citizens, in large numbers, are away at the war and cannot look after their interests. To take the job of a Britisher who is called up may, debatably, count as 'helping the national war effort', but what of the Britisher when he returns, and his peace effort?

The position may be alleviated a little, if they do not return, by the fact that some of the more influential of these people, after staying just long enough in England to proclaim that they were a hundred per cent British, found means when war broke out to transmigrate further, and become for the nonce a hundred per cent American. Such was the case of a much-publicized writer who saw the light of day in Rumania, then spent some years in Germany as a hundred per cent German, came to England after the advent of Hitler and announced simultaneously that he still loved Germany but was a hundred per cent British, and then moved on to confer the boon of his citizenship upon the United States.

Such cases as are known do not suggest that the provision about 'the interests of British citizens' actually operates, in the granting of employment to these newcomers.

For instance, in the early days of the resumed war (I am forestalling my narrative a little, for the sake of coherency) the Ministry of Information decided to make a film called '49th Parallel'. The 49th parallel is the boundary separating Canada

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from the United States, an attractive location for film-making when war is being waged all over Europe.

This film was to have been the most stupendous contribution to our war effort, and Miss Elisabeth Bergner, who was born, I believe, within the limits of the old Austro-Hungarian monarchy, who saw the heyday of her fame in pre-Hitler Germany, who then came to England and who at some function for Austrian patriots paid the last Austrian Minister, Sir George Franckenstein, the eloquent tribute, in her delightful English, that he was 'a passionate Austrian', Miss Bergner was chosen to play the lead — and crossed the Atlantic.

The Ministry of Information advanced the sum of £22,086 13s. 7d., towards this film, which has not yet been completed; whether it will be completed in time to give that enormous impetus to our war effort which was confidently expected from it seems doubtful. A large number of other people, including Miss Bergner's husband, were given for the purpose of going to Canada to make this film those coveted exit permits which a British subject, having no particular contribution to offer to the country's war effort, might vainly seek to obtain for his children. I believe one or two of them have returned.

Why the film was so long delayed is a thing not yet explained. Miss Bergner, in a radio-telephonic interview from pleasant Hollywood (she seemingly did not penetrate farther towards the frozen north than Winnipeg), intimated to a London newspaper that she felt she had a grievance about the whole business. I do not know what part she was intended to play, but having the most pleasant memories of her personality, and of her charmingly squirming manner of expressing herself, I wonder whether she was better suited than any British actress of the day for the part of some hardy Anglo-Saxon woman pioneer.

However, in this case the Ministry of Labour was apparently satisfied that there was no conflict with the interests of any British player; the Ministry of Information thought that the good which would accrue to the country's cause was worth £22,000; and the Passport and Permit Department of the Foreign Office considered

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the undertaking of sufficient 'national importance' for the hardy and one hundred per cent British pioneers, to be allowed to cross the Atlantic.

I have quoted only this one case. There are many others, great and small, which might make a sane patriot wonder sadly if all was well.

Not one member of Parliament has ever risen to protest against this kind of thing, which in its patent unfairness is in such shrieking contrast to the clean white faith and spirit of the millions of Britishers, and of their allies, who are fighting all over the world, on land, at sea and in the air, to retrieve the world.

But the attitude of the British Parliament in the question of the Jews is curious. When great problems of the British Empire are under discussion the House is sometimes almost empty; speakers address twenty, forty, sixty of their fellow-members, in a House containing 615. The Colonial Empire, with its 50,000,000 inhabitants, is discussed but once a year in this House, and at the last such debate there were never more than a hundred members present. On one famous occasion Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, as Dominions Minister, tried hard to awaken interest in important colonial problems. 'We are combating sleeping sickness,' he said — and the few members present roared with laughter, for one of the Government whips was sleeping quietly beside Mr. MacDonald on the Front Bench. The noise of their mirth even awoke him.

A marvellous picture of England in wartime, of front-line life — for are we not 'all in the front line' this time, even those on the Front Bench?

Yet this House, with its 600 odd (and I mean, odd) members earning a minimum of £600 a year, with its indifference to the domestic scandals of England — for if you explore the wastes of Hansard you will find that the party elected to represent the working-class seemingly has as little interest as the Tory Party in the derelict areas and the slums — this House can at any moment be stung to impassioned activity by the mere mention of the word 'Jews'!

This was the most curious and most perturbing result of my



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study of the Parliamentary debates between the resumption of the World War, in 1939, and the end of 1940. As I have said, such great Imperial problems as that of the colonies received only the briefest and most transient attention and aroused but the most languid interest in a sparsely attended House.

The matter of the 'friendly aliens' was given four full debates; the Palestine debate, in which it cropped up in another form, was in reality a fifth; and at Question Time hundreds upon hundreds of questions were put on behalf of this group of people. I think, if a close analysis of the debates were made, it might be found that this subject occupied more parliamentary time, in the British House of Commons, than any other single question, during the period I have mentioned!

A perusal of the Parliamentary Reports for this period will show anyone who may be interested that there is a number of Members in the House who seemingly devote their entire attention to this matter. Elected by British voters and paid by the British taxpayer, their constituents seem in effect to be practically without representation in the British Parliament; while the group of immigrants in whose interest they expend so much energy is represented out of all proportion to its size and value to this country.

This state of affairs led to the most absurd extravagances, especially during the summer months of 1940, when Britain passed through her greatest ordeal for many centuries. A patriotic Englishman, reading the Parliamentary Reports of that period, might clutch his head to find that the sufferings of his fellow-countrypeople were of small account compared with those of a group of alien immigrants.

Scores of thousands of British soldiers, cast into the enemy's hands by the collapse of the French and Belgians on their flanks, were prisoners in Germany. Thousands of Britishers from the Channel Islands lost everything they had and found themselves, overnight, homeless and destitute refugees in England. Thousands more who had been earning their livelihoods in Germany, in France, in Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium, were in like plight.

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In Nice, reported *The Times*, 'several hundred British subjects, mostly elderly retired people, have been sleeping on borrowed mattresses in the streets and are for the most part penniless and starving'. The lot of 'the British refugees' [subsequently alleviated] was even mentioned, once, in *The Times*, which said that letters reaching it referred 'with some bitterness, to the lack of assistance; according to one correspondent British subjects who followed the British Ambassador's advice and left Germany when war appeared inevitable regret bitterly their action, and say that, at least, the Nazis would have fed them'.

Not only that, but this country awaited, day and night, an invasion which, if it had succeeded, would have meant the submergence of the British nation for centuries, and Britons of all classes, armed with shotguns or unarmed, lay on the coasts and in the hedgerows after their working hours to defend their native land, if they could. Not only that, but the moment was approaching for London and the other great cities to be mercilessly bombed, and as this was plain to foresee the urgent need of the hour was to prepare deep shelters, health services and food distribution, and the removal of women and children to safe places.

Yet, if you wade through the columns of Hansard for those days, you will find but meagre reference to these things, but you will find pages of protest and expostulation on behalf of 'the friendly aliens'. In terms of despairing incomprehension ('How can anybody be so stupid?') speaker after speaker asked why the services of these 'friendly aliens' were not immediately used to promote our 'war effort'.

Yet at this time more than a million friendly Britons languished in unemployment; hardly a Member thought of them, or troubled to ask why their services were not used to promote this same 'war effort'. That 'friendly aliens' were denied employment was proclaimed to be disgusting and even anti-patriotic; the denial of employment to native citizens of the country was seemingly thought to be natural. The internment of 'friendly aliens' was declared to be inhumane, intolerable, incompatible with all British tradition, and 'incalculably harmful to us in American

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eyes'. The internment, without charges or trial, of British subjects was generally accepted to be a necessary measure in war-time and, during all this windy, ignorant and prejudiced debate, hardly a voice challenged it.

The discussion reached its peak of insincerity in the debate of July 10th, 1940. At that time the plight of Britain was desperate. France had collapsed, Britain stood alone, and Britain was unready. The months, July, August and September of 1940, were the most dreadful in British history since 1066, and hardly anybody in this country knows, as I know, because I know what the Germans had in mind, what Britain was spared through the fact, or miracle, that the remnant of the Royal Air Force was still strong enough to inflict such damage on Göring's fighters and bombers that the invasion had repeatedly to be postponed and now cannot succeed if it is attempted.

On that day in July the issue was not yet decided, and the threat of an indescribable fate hung heavy in the sultry sky. In such a crisis the debate about the 'friendly aliens' was resumed, with all the extravagant arguments and statements which I have already summarized. The voice of England was hardly heard in this debate, which might have been held upon another planet for all the relation it had with the dire realities of life in this country at that time.

Only Mrs. Tate, of Frome, came forward to say:

While we sympathize with some of these people, our first consideration should be for our own people and the cause for which they are fighting. You have no right to risk, by one hour, the fight against the awful power which is enveloping the world . . . In the case of certain Members in this House, one has only to say the word 'Jew' and they lose all sense of reason. . . .

and Mr. Logan, of the Scotland Division of Liverpool, to say:

I have heard to-night much commiseration with alien refugees, but I have heard very little about the danger to our own country and the protection that is necessary for our own

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people . . . In my home to-day we are suffering from the fact that two members of the family have had to go away again. In the last war three sons and three brothers went away . . . I am beginning to think that the strong arm of Britain and the loyalty of our sons here and abroad are the only things we can count as solid. Moral values are of little account. Why should we trouble if one or two, or a thousand, suspects are interned if this land of ours is safe? We have had no knowledge of an invasion in our day. Only the history books record a conqueror coming here. But we know our men who returned from Dunkirk, and we know of the wonderful work of our airmen. That ought to teach the House the value of courage and teach it to be self-confident and to look after Number One first, giving protection to those who come to our shores only when we know they deserve it . . . We have in this country sentimentalists concerned about every country except their own, and always pleading for some poor creature in one part of the world or another; but I reckon that I, too, have something to complain of. I represent a particular section who, according to some people, are disloyal; but they are not. There are people in my streets who were in the Dunkirk business. The streets in which I live are the poorest in Liverpool, but some of those streets were decorated with flags and festoons and 'God Save The King' — a thing unheard of in the Irish parts of Liverpool. Do not let us have so much sentimentality. I have heard of women without children talking about how to keep families together. [This seems to have been a thrust at certain other speakers in the debate.] We are having too much of that kind of sentimentality in this House. Let those who know something of the subject speak on it. When your sons are going out and your neighbours are going out, it is time to look into what the Government are doing . . . I hope the Government will be loyal to the country first and generous to their friends afterwards.

This was the reply to the debate of Sir Edward Grigg, Joint Under-Secretary of State for war:

I have listened to the greater part of this debate and am bound to say that I have never been more greatly struck by

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one of the great qualities of the House of Commons, and that is its power of detachment. There has been going on this afternoon, I suppose, one of the greatest air battles of the war. At this moment — I do not know whether it is so — bombers may be over many of our towns. To-night thousands of our forces will be on the alert waiting for an attack which may come in several places at dawn. That army, after all, with the Navy and the Air Force, stands between this country and destruction and between all that this House of Commons represents and destruction, and yet we have been discussing this afternoon as though, when this Army is asked to help in providing security for this country, and when we are being asked to have this or that possible handicap removed, we are pursuing a ridiculous form of militarism which this House ought to condemn. That is the point of many of the speeches to which I have listened this afternoon, and I am bound to say that when the honourable Member for the Scotland Division of Liverpool [Mr. Logan] got up, I felt that a breath of fresh air had been blown into this House, and I was deeply grateful. In the approach of many Members of this House to this problem there was an atmosphere of unreality which to me was positively terrifying . . . I was also grateful to my honourable Friend the Member for Frome [Mrs. Tate] when she intervened, because she stated, with great courage, and I thought force, the view which the soldiers have. They are a very considerable part of this country at the present time, and they are carrying a greater responsibility than any Member of this House, except those who wear uniform. That is the situation at the present time. This country has always been a great asylum for the distressed refugees from other countries, but it would be foolish not to recognize that, in the opinion of its own people, it is beginning to be a great asylum in another sense . . . After all, we have destroyed the French Navy, against the heart of every sailor in this country, and it is not very much to ask friends of this country among these aliens to meet hardship and inconvenience if in the end the victory on which they depend as much as we do may be made in any way more certain. Honourable Members say that the reputation of this country is at stake. It is. There is only one

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thing that will save the reputation of this country and all that it stands for, and that is victory in the war.

These voices which spoke for England, however, did not avail, as I shall show. The view that the feeling of the men who were fighting, of the young manhood of Britain, should count, was a rare one in the strange assembly which was the British House of Commons in 1939 and 1940.

There was another debate in which those Members who, as Mrs. Tate put it, 'lose all reason when the word "Jew" is mentioned' had much to say, and I must mention it here, because it was more illuminating than any other of the way in which they present the case of the Jews as an unanswerable one, which no humane or reasonable man would challenge, and dispose of all reasoned arguments raised against it by yapping, 'Anti-Semite'!

In this debate they were bitter about the anti-Semitism of the Arabs, who, as I have explained, are also Semites, and this was fairly typical of its level. But the most instructive thing was the manner in which they all completely ignored, when it was raised and proved against the Jews, the charge of 'discrimination' which they repeatedly brought against those who criticized the Jewish method. And this is the very root and core of the problem.

This debate turned on new regulations which the British Government had introduced in Palestine to check the sales of Arab land to Jews. The spokesman for the Jews came mainly from those who are supposed to represent the British working class, and they accused the Government, among other things, of imitating Dr. Goebbels in trying 'to keep Palestine clean of Jews', of repudiating moral contracts and promises made to the Jews, even of 'striking a grievous blow at our national unity and our national cause', of 'throwing Palestine into turmoil again', of 'practising racial discrimination against the Jews', of 'introducing restrictions on racial grounds', of 'betraying the cause of freedom', of 'inflicting fresh wrong on the tortured, humiliated, suffering Jewish people', and much more.

(Almost the only intelligent and intelligible speech by a private member in this debate, I must interpolate, came from a British Jew, Mr. Lipson, who described himself as 'one to whom his

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religion has always meant a great deal and who as a member of this House has tried to do his own thinking'. The second part of this remark may not have been meant as a rebuke to those who had in such meaningless and ill-informed phrases championed the cause of his co-religionists, but it fits. Mr. Lipson, almost the only speaker to understand what he was talking about, and, seemingly apprehensive lest the Jewish case should be damaged by so much extravagant exaggeration, said that Great Britain was fighting for the freedom of the human spirit, and that included freedom of speech, freedom of thought, the right of free people to their own existence, and the right of minorities to be different. If these things were lost, all would be lost. The survival of the Jews depended on the continuance of these things. Great Britain in this war had been said to be fighting for her existence. That was true, but if — which God forbid — Great Britain were to lose the war, she would live to fight again. If the Allies were to lose, however, the Jews might very well be finished for ever . . . Therefore to the Jew the war must be the overriding issue whenever any question arose during those anxious and difficult days. What would happen to the Jews if the Nazis were to prevail?)

Now let me point to the real crux of this debate, which all speakers ignored. Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, defending the Government's action as Secretary of State for the Colonies, said that the protest against it of the Jewish Agency had spoken about the rights of weak peoples, and the Government fully recognized the rights of the Jews in Palestine, but there was another small people in Palestine — the Arabs, who had rights equal to the rights of the Jews. He then revealed that land bought from the Arabs in Palestine for Jewish settlement, by the Jewish National Fund, was, under the conditions of that Fund:

*not allowed at any time in the future, under any conditions whatsoever, to be alienated to anyone who is not a Jew. If the Jewish authorities consider that condition necessary in order to protect the interests of their own people, I do not know why they quarrel with us when we say that a similar condition, and, perhaps, a far less permanent condition, is required to protect the interests of the Arab population. . . .*

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This passage, as I say, was the crux of the debate. In it the Jewish doctrine of discrimination against non-Jews is clearly revealed. I can see no difference between this anti-Semitism (for the Arabs, if I may repeat myself, are also Semites) and the anti-Semitism of National Socialism. It is discrimination in exactly the same form which the Jews are wont to practise, in European and other countries, in those trades and professions in which they become predominant.

Yet, after this disclosure of Mr. MacDonald, a Member was found (Colonel Wedgwood) to say, of the regulations issued by the British Government to counteract this anti-Arab discrimination:

American publicists and columnists have now seen that we here, fighting Hitler with our mouths, are copying his practice. This is precisely Hitler's policy of soil and blood, a policy of ultra-nationalism, preserving Palestine for one definite race. When shall we get away from the idea that this world is composed of a lot of different incompatible races? . . . We are importing that spirit into British legislation, importing it in the worst place, setting up in Palestine exactly the same anti-Jewish legislation that Hitler has forced upon Germany. Discrimination between two sorts of citizens on account of their ancestry is new to this country and has been imported by the right honourable Gentleman in imitation of the doctrines preached in Germany to-day. If there could be a worse blow at our prosecution of the war than this I should like to know what it is. All over the world this will be held up against us. . . .

I think the passages I have quoted show where discrimination begins, and I hope their perusal may lead some people to study statements made in Parliament with a critical eye. But in the name of unreason, why cannot the gentle Gentile champions of the Jews, for once, give an answer to this plain question: Why do they find discrimination natural, liberal, democratic and proper, when practised by Jews, but detestable, foul, illiberal and undemocratic when practised in retaliation by non-Jews?

I must quote one other statement in this debate, in which the



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anti-Semitism of the Jews in Palestine was so conspicuously ignored, a statement made by Mr. Noel-Baker: 'There is one indispensable solution — the Jewish National Home in Palestine — and whatever else there may be, there must be that as well.'

Mr. Noel-Baker was among the foremost advocates in Parliament of the opening of employment in this country to the 'friendly aliens'. Does he believe that the Jews should be helped to a Jewish ruled, exclusive, discriminatory Jewish State in Palestine, and simultaneously hold the full rights of citizenship in this and other countries? That is something no non-Jew ever presumed to demand for himself. One thing or the other.

For what, then, are the Jews and what do they want? The subtle argument of the propagandist films sent out from Hollywood and of their wordier champions in this country is that they are persecuted people who wish nothing more than to be left in peace, and who desire, all of them, above all things, to fight for us.

It is much more difficult to define them. Dispersed throughout the world, they may themselves best be compared to a sphere of which the steel core is the body of fiercely intolerant, anti-Gentile Jews, while these qualities diminish as you work outward towards the softer peel. J. B. Priestley, in an article fiercely attacking 'the dirty old game of Jew-baiting' — would those Jewish regulations in Palestine be called Arab-baiting, or the disinheritance clause of a Jewish will Gentile-baiting? — undercut his own argument by saying: 'Nobody can deny that there is . . . a real Jewish problem in the modern world. Their present position is unsatisfactory to everybody. They are neither definitely separating themselves from other races, nor merging themselves with them. They are uneasily hanging in mid-air . . . When we Gentiles dislike a Jew it is because we feel that he wants to be one of us and at the same time not to be one of us, to enjoy all our holidays and then quietly take a Jewish one of his own. The problem will never be settled until the Jew decides either to move farther away or to come nearer. That is all that really needs to be said.'

That comes near to the truth, with a few exceptions. First, the problem is not one 'of the modern world', but goes back to the

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beginning of recorded time, for the reasons Mr. Priestley stated. Secondly, it will never be settled, because by all that long experience the Jew never will decide 'to move farther away or come nearer'; he wants to have his Jewish cake and eat Gentile cake. And thirdly, that is not 'all that needs to be said'; a great deal more needs to be said, in the interest of the non-Jews.

For what are the Jews? They are the most complex people in the world and to claim to know their inmost souls and their uttermost motives, as do some of those Westminster-bound Members, is fatuous. Trebitsch Lincoln was a Jew, who was born in Hungary and became an Anglican clergyman in Canada and a Member of Parliament (yes, that same Parliament whose members now, twenty-five years later, are so sure about their Jew) in England, and turned out to be a German agent in the last war and after it was press-chief to the first anti-Semitic Putschists in Germany, the friends of Hitler (yes, Hitler too has availed himself of the services of Jews, among them the lady who, in collaboration with an English peer, did that spadework 'which made the Munich Agreement possible') and is now a Buddhist monk in far Thibet. Napoleon's press chief, for that matter, was a Portuguese Jew, Lewis Goldschmidt, who, with all the fire of a Goebbels or a Gayda, in his *Argus* described the British Navy, three months before Trafalgar, as dilapidated, dispersed, incompetent and on the verge of mutiny, and England as decadent, degenerate and defeated. And did not the good Lewis Goldschmidt, after Waterloo, enter into the employ of the British Embassy in Paris, and even marry his daughter to an English peer?

Loyalties are not so easy to discover. In Prague, just before Hitler marched into that city, was a rabbi, of whom a Jew told me, who instructed his people that Hitler was the Jewish Messiah, because the result of his work would be to open to the Jews all those countries, throughout the world, which were still closed to them. In Swansea, when the present war had been resumed, was a 67-year-old Russian Jew who had been in this country since he was a boy; he was sent to prison for saying: 'Hitler is a friend of mine — he is a good man. The English took Palestine from the

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Jews and Hitler is going to take England. Hitler is doing right.'

In West Hampstead was an 18-year-old German Jew who, like so many others, landed in this country surreptitiously and therefore did not appear in the official figures of 'aliens registered with the police'; he told the Thames magistrate that he wished to return to fight for Germany. In Stepney was a 25-year old Austrian Jew who, when he appeared before an 'enemy alien' tribunal to prove that he was a 'friendly alien', picked up an inkwell and threw it at the judge; what may his loyalty have been?

Yet the spokesmen in our Parliament of these people will admit of no arguments against them; they are all 'friendly', all highly talented, and all desperately anxious to fight for England.

What is the sense of ignoring things which everybody knows? There was, for instance, the case of the ten East End Jews, most of them of Polish origin, who conspired to evade military service by sending up an unfit man, in their respective names, for medical examination; he received from £20 to £200 for his services. These men were detected and convicted. One of them, who was quick enough to escape the police by decamping to the Channel Islands, was there when the Germans arrived, when he decided to return to England and was arrested and sentenced.

The loyalties of the Jews are far more difficult to determine than their advocates in this country would admit. When Poland was fighting Germany, for instance, and Russia jumped on Poland's back, taking half Poland for herself, the Jews in that part of Poland 'hailed the Russian troops as deliverers'. The scene was described by the Correspondent of the *News Chronicle*, William Forrest. What Englishman would not understand that this left a feeling of bitterness in the minds of the Poles, who subsequently organized a magnificent army in this country? Yet as soon as the existence of this feeling became known those newspapers which make the cause of the Jews their own, before all others, began violently to attack the Poles, to cry that they were not worthy to fight in the ranks of 'democracy', that they were as bad as the Nazis, and the like.

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I remember Jews in the trenches, in the air force, and in hospital in the last war, and know how well they fought. They were neither braver nor less brave than the rest; they just fitted in. But these were British Jews, who had been long in this country. They were not 'Englishmen'; it is almost impossible for a Jew to be that, because he will not, save in rare cases, allow himself to be assimilated, he is too much aware of the differences in his blood, his religion, his upbringing, his fellow-Jews. These British Jews of long domicile will understand, probably better than most Gentile readers, many of the things I have written in this book; they know that where the Jew from Eastern Europe suddenly appears in large numbers, the old trouble starts all over again, and they fear it. They are said, and I believe this, from their very understanding of the problem to have formed private 'tribunals of self-discipline' to check those who may bring them into discredit.

But they have an extremely difficult task before them. The campaign to squeeze the newcomers into English life has as yet been carried on with a ruthless and relentless disregard for any point of view but theirs which bodes ill for the future.

I assume that many Jews are, must be, serving in the British armed forces during the war which has now been resumed, though no man could go about London at this time without remarking how seldom a typically Jewish face is seen beneath a uniform cap, how often such faces are seen above white collars in the hotels and restaurants.

When the air raids on London began, and Londoners were having a very bad time indeed, the *New Statesman* published a letter urging that refugees interned in the Isle of Man should be released 'before the rains come', lest their health suffer from confinement 'in the dining-rooms of their 34 houses'. This was at a time when hundreds of thousands of Londoners were sleeping on the platforms of tube stations, in unheated cellars, beneath railway arches, and the like, and it drew the following comment from one of the native citizens, a London 'Shelter Marshal':

May I inquire (1) how the health of these internees will stand up to numerous daylight raids and to nightly dusk-to-dawn

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confinement in packed shelters under heavy bombardment? (2) how the health of the other crowded users of these shelters will stand up to a yet bigger incursion of panic-stricken aliens into their midst?

Apart from the space problem (and I must reluctantly admit that the average 'friendly' alien seems to need a lot more shelter 'Lebensraum' than the average Londoner), one of the major difficulties of some London public shelters is the throng of neurotic foreign refugees who spend their lives, apparently, in an hysterical quest for 100 per cent safety at night.

Another thing that troubled me when I returned to England and began to study at close quarters a problem of which I had seen the other end, was the suspicion that the foreign Jews were tending to receive preferential treatment even from British justice! Now this is a very serious thing, if it is true, for in no other country that I know is justice so implacably rigorous as in this. True, it seemed to me, like everything else in England, to have its first, second and third-class compartments, and I once raised a violently protesting eyebrow at my loudspeaker when I heard Sir William Jowitt, K.C., say, 'The law is the same for rich and poor alike'.

Some newspapers grant the most unrestricted freedom for the publication of views with which they are in agreement; and in the sense that the millionaire and the pauper who stole a loaf of bread would probably be treated alike I was prepared to believe him. But further than that I did not feel that I could go with this great King's Counsel.

I had an uneasy feeling, for instance, that murder was not murder if committed at Oxford University, but was apt to be attributed invariably to a foreign crook called Schizophrenia. I had also remarked that members of ducal families found the most benevolent understanding of their quite honourable motives for committing what looked like criminal offences when they appeared before a local bench manned, or womanned, by members of local county families. I further remarked that a financier who

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died owing £80,000 to the Income Tax authorities, which he had been owing for several years, was generally held to have been a most estimable and successful man, but that people who owed a few pounds received summonses to appear at the Guildhall and were sometimes promptly committed to the cells.

But the severity of the British law in punishing small offences of theft by poor people far surpassed anything I had ever encountered on the Continent, in any country. I mentioned in a previous book the cases of a van boy and a shopboy who, for stealing 1s. and 10s. respectively, were sent to prison for one and six months. I have records of many other such cases: for instance, the 66-year-old unemployed labourer of Bolton who received a month for stealing sixpennyworth of coal; the 18-year-old girl who, having been bound over on a charge of theft in the first place on condition that she ceased to take slimming tablets, later appeared on a charge of breaking this promise and was sent to gaol for six months! This last case seems to me to deserve inclusion in any calendar of judicial curiosities. The 18-year-old girl in question, incidentally, was not without wits or wit; she asked, before she went to the cells, 'if it was against the law to take these tablets, why were they manufactured and sold?'

These very rigours of our judicial system, in its dealings with the lower orders, seemed to me in strange contrast with the exceptionally easygoing treatment which was often given to 'friendly aliens'. Nearly all the Metropolitan magistrates have, at one time or another, expressed grave misgivings about the size of the trade in smuggling aliens into this country: the late Mr. Herbert Metcalfe's 'These people are simply pouring into the country wholesale' was typical. But on that occasion the aliens officer in court explained that it was 'known in Antwerp that people could come to the United Kingdom irregularly and be dealt with lightly'.

No amount of research can discover what happens to the innumerable persons whose deportation these magistrates daily recommend, but all the signs suggest that when they have served their sentence, if any — and some of them are very bad characters,

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as my notes show — they either resume life in England somehow or contrive to return.

But what particularly attracted my notice — and I invite the attention of others to it — is that at one time the plea, 'I am a refugee from Hitlerist persecution' seemed to be regarded as an extenuating circumstance, almost to the point of annulling the offence, even in cases completely removed from the necessity to escape from Hitler.

I have a collection of quite extraordinary examples. For instance, a lady who was summoned for dangerously driving a borrowed motor-car pleaded that she was 'a refugee from Hitlerist persecution' and practically penniless, whereon she was fined sixpence, 'in view of your sad circumstances'. Any who have experienced, as I have experienced, the normally rigorous treatment of offending drivers by British benches will appreciate this case. A young lady who stole twelve pairs of stockings was fined 5s.; she was a refugee. A Polish rabbi who was convicted of harbouring a large number of foreign Jews without informing the police was fined £50 — but the fine was later reduced to £5. Two men who were convicted of assisting a 'friendly alien' to evade registration were fined £5 each — but the fine was later reduced to a farthing.

The state of affairs which I found in England, when I returned to it, was being reproduced in the Dominions. None knew South Africa better than the late Sir Abe Bailey, and none was less likely than he to be accused of unfriendliness towards the Jews. I wish therefore to invite particular consideration to this letter which he wrote to *The Times* a few days before the World War broke out again in September 1939. I have italicized the passages which are of especial importance:

The proceedings at the international conference of Jews in Geneva and letters and articles appearing in the Press are unfortunately creating an impression that many Jews are committing the mistake of their Nazi persecutors (exterminators and destroyers of religion) and looking at their present and future problems entirely as if nobody else in the world mattered but themselves.

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At a time when Great Britain, the best friend of the Jews, is harassed and embarrassed and ringed round with envious and desperate enemies and when the Middle East is only one of many arenas where our whole Imperial position is at stake, far too many Jews, in voicing their grievances, make no allowance for the appalling difficulties and dangers which confront the British Government all over the world. To listen to the recital of these grievances one would think the only problem which Mr. Malcolm MacDonald has to face in Palestine (as a result of the British Government making it their national home) was the distribution of land among Jews and Arabs, with an open door to Jewish immigrants, whereas the Jews ought to know that the Government of which he is a member has to deal with strategic considerations which affect the whole of the Middle East, and at a time when the clouds of war are threatening British dominion in all the seven seas. The British Government's positive policy is fair play to Jew and Arab alike, realizing the fact that economically they are interlocked.

The almost contemptuous disregard for other interests except those of their own is illustrated by a letter which appeared in your own columns recently from Professor Namier and in a remarkable article in a recent issue of the *Economist*, which, dealing with the problem of refugees in Britain, says:

*Obviously not all refugees are capable of making an equal contribution to British prosperity. There may be some who are undesirable on other than economic grounds. But on the average they are more helpful to the community than the average Englishman, whether the standard is monetary, capital, industrial skill or intellectual attainments.*

It is true that the *Economist* in a subsequent issue expressed its regret that this passage should have lent itself to misunderstanding, but the whole tenor of the article unfortunately illustrated only too clearly the arrogance with which the claims of Jewish extremists are being advocated.

The supreme aim of Jewish statesmanship to-day is to see to it that the persecution of Jewry in Central Europe does not lead to world persecution and that the policy of fear and oppression which began in Germany does not spread to other countries. I speak with some experience in these matters, for I have seen



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the rise in South Africa of a wave of anti-Semitism which the Nazis confidently hope will one day redound to their benefit. *When I was trading as a youth and used to cross South Africa from one end to the other, I found nearly all the stores, inns, and hotels on the roadside, in villages and towns, run by Britishers, mainly Scotsmen, but now they are mostly in the hands of Jews and Indians. Jews are steadily working their way into many of the professions, particularly the law and medicine, and are locking up these professions for themselves. Recently they have made attempts to secure a strong foothold in the Press of South Africa and in various cultural organizations.*

It is almost a truism that a community can absorb only a certain proportion of Jews. When that proportion is exceeded, as it is in South Africa, anti-Semitism follows and is further fanned by too exclusive an expression of Jewish aspirations and ambitions.

All decent-minded people deplore the cruel persecutions practised on Jews in Nazi Germany. Jews must play their part in doing all they can to put bounds to an infection which may one day poison the whole world.

The passages I have italicized are of especial value, coming from such an authority with so wide a circle of Jewish friends. In particular the quotation from the *Economist* is of the greatest interest.

Audacity is notoriously a very powerful weapon, and one the Jews particularly love, because it has served them well. Their argument, that they should oust the native-born Gentiles because they are in all respects better than these was never more openly and audaciously expressed. That it could be printed in the British press, at a time when sober arguments against the Jewish case, however well founded, could nowhere find a place in it, unless they carried such a signature as that of Sir Abe Bailey, when they might appear in an obscure correspondence column, is the best possible illustration of the measure of 'freedom' which has prevailed in the press of this country in this particular respect.

This argument, that the foreign Jews, the 'friendly aliens', are much cleverer and in every way more suitable than ourselves and should therefore be given preference in employment is that im-

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publicly taken over by the innumerable spokesmen of these people in the British press and parliament.

It is the argument I have repeatedly heard myself from the lips of Jews, who did not realize that I was well versed in their methods in many foreign countries. This was the reason, they would have had me believe, that their newspapers in Berlin and Vienna, Prague and Budapest, were entirely staffed by Jews: that the local non-Jews were simply not equal to the work. They were of course not up to the standard of British journalists, these would-be wily ones would add, with a quick sideways glance at myself.

It is the method of discrimination, impure but simple. In this country it has already, in some cases, reached absurd lengths. I have before me a long press 'puff' about a young Jew from Hungary who was chosen to play the part of a British schoolboy in a British film 'because he looked so English'. That is to say, no English schoolboys were available who looked so English as he! The public of a country must have reached a sad state of stupidity when such tricks can be played on it.

The second passage which I have italicized in Sir Abe Bailey's letter shows the consequences to which these methods lead — as they led in the European countries I knew, as they will lead in this country unless they are checked.

In the other British Dominions the same thing is happening, while the men are away at the war.

'Assisted passages' to Australia, which might have replenished that continent with British blood, were suspended by the British Government from 1930 to 1938, when they were resumed until August 1939. Who was 'assisted' to go to Australia during this year when the assistance was resumed? — 10,992 persons, of whom 881 were British! The bulk of the others were foreign Jews; indeed of the 10,111 non-Britons no less than 5,321 were of German nationality, which means that they were nearly all Jews from Germany.

'The Government's policy in this very important matter has produced disastrous results where Australia is concerned,' wrote Sir Henry Galway, a former Governor of South Australia, to *The*

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*Times* on March 10th, 1940. 'If this policy is persisted in, it will not take more than a couple of generations before Australia's proud boast of a population with 95 per cent British stock is silenced. One of the many evils resulting from the substitution of alien for British stock is that the industries are by degrees falling under foreign control. For instance, the sugar and pea-nut industries are already fairly well in the hands of the alien, while the fruit industry is going that way. In spite of there being a war on, unemployment in Britain is still at an abnormally high figure. Crowds of boys are unable to get employment even under the Derby and other schemes. Why should they not be permitted to go to Australia, where they are wanted, if they wish to? . . . The average Member of Parliament is woefully ignorant on the subject of migration, though I willingly allow that there are many bright exceptions . . . I humbly contend that it is up to the Government to do all in their power to save Australia from being swamped by people of alien race.'

To conclude the picture I have given I have to add that by January 1941 the last safeguards in this problem had been abandoned in Britain.

It was officially announced that the Ministry of Labour felt that it should pursue 'a more positive policy of welcoming the 250,000 long-term foreign residents and refugees alongside our own workers'. Both employers and trades unions were in agreement with this policy. (The only opposition to it, as *The Times* alone remarked, came from the workshops, that is to say, from the native workers, who had so little to say in these matters.)

These aliens were to have 'the same wages and conditions of work as British subjects', and they were also to have 'the benefits of the health and unemployment insurance schemes', into which the British workers had for many years been paying weekly contributions.

With this announcement the last barriers fell, and the British public, if any member of it happened to be watching, which I doubt, would have seen that it had once again picked quite a different card from that which it thought to have chosen. That

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which it had obtained was quite different from that which had been promised.

These people had come, not to stay, oh no, only as trans-migrants; they would be no charge on the British taxpayer, oh no, 'private individuals' and 'voluntary organizations' had guaranteed their maintenance; they would not swamp the home labour market, oh no, they would not be allowed to take employment.

But now they were come to stay! The cost of their maintenance fell on the British taxpayer, and when they were out of work, they would draw the dole from the British Unemployment Insurance Fund built up by the contributions of British workers! They would be eligible for all employment!

And I foresee, if I am not mistaken, that when this war is over British citizenship may be granted to them because they came to us and 'helped our war effort'. John Hammer, who worked in a foundry during the war, Jack Pickaxe, who worked down a mine, and Tommy Rifle, who served in the infantry will not find that they are entitled to any especial consideration after the war because they 'helped the national war effort'.

May they be spared the cold and bitter struggle to find any kind of work which their forerunners had when they came back from the first World War, in 1918.

I think it a regrettable thing that the last barriers were levelled by a Socialist Minister of Labour, a man of working-class origins himself.

It is a grave state of affairs that I have described. I saw it coming, from the Continent, and said so in the second book I wrote of this series of three. The greatest single factor in Hitler's rise to power was the embitterment and desperation of the German war generation — I mean, the 1914-18 war. Those men, when they came back, found every road to advancement and useful employment closed to them, and they found many trades and professions locked-up by foreign Jews who had come to their country from Poland and elsewhere while they were away.

Before very long the Englishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen and

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Irishmen of this generation will be coming home from the war they are fighting to retrieve that civilization of which we last saw some trace in the Dark Ages. The Australians, with fresh laurels, will be returning to Australia, the South Africans to South Africa, the Canadians to Canada and the New Zealanders to New Zealand.

In Britain and in the Dominions a great mass of alien immigrants has been allowed to settle and take employment. Will they yield this employment when the soldiers, the sailors, and the airmen come home, or are these latter to traipse and trail idly about the streets, as they did after the last war; or in the better event, are they to find the higher posts occupied by people, many of them of alien blood, who have barnacled-in while they were away under the motto of 'helping the national war effort'?

These aliens number, as far as one can judge, some hundreds of thousands. That is a very large mass to throw upon the labour market, to inject into the trades and professions, and it has been repeatedly proved that, once in, they exert their influence to help others in and to exclude non-Jews. Since the 1914-18 war there have seldom been less than a million friendly Britons unemployed in this country, and in some years their number has risen to several millions. The derelict areas and the slums still offer grim and spectral proof of the misrule of England in those between-war years. The new burden that has been put upon the British back is a very heavy one.

A bad day's work has been done in this last year or so. I came back from abroad in 1939, after many years, fearing this only less than the war I knew was coming. I saw the things the same influx led to in other countries. If I am not a Boetian, they will come in England: the lowering of the levels of taste and talent, the swamping of the last native standards and customs and traditions, the introduction of a meretricious and alien way of life, the squeezing-out of youth and enthusiasm. Experience — and this is the tragic thing — teaches no lessons.

But the arguments I have raised are sober ones, that cannot be shouted down by cries of 'anti-Semite' or any other meaningless word. The policy that has been pursued is just as false in its field

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as was the policy of Munich — and the result of that policy was not peace, but war.

And Rupert Brooke, if he lived to-day, would need to write:

‘And there the Jews!’

## CHAPTER 6

### AND HAVING WRIT

WHEN I came back to England in the spring of 1939 I brought with me, in my mind's eye, the picture of the Germans marching into Czechoslovakia and of the Poles awaiting the next onslaught, which by that time was certain to be directed against them. I wrote this in the book, *Disgrace Abounding*, which I managed to get out six months before the war began.

I returned knowing that a short time, and one last chance, remained to avert war and save the peace. While I wandered about London and England, in the summer of 1939, the European line-up moved to its long foreseeable climax, dreadfully, implacably, hopelessly, as if that climax were a tornado or some other natural catastrophe which the wit of man could not hope to prevent, rather than a man-made disaster which resolute and vigorous men could have forethwarted.

The last chance was never taken, never seemed likely to be taken. The approaching war was a runaway train which could have been switched on to an up-gradient so that it should come to a standstill; but it was watched as if it were lava from Vesuvius. A man was sometimes driven to ask himself if the armaments-makers were after all in full control and were resolved not to let this war slip through their fingers.

After Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia, so often proclaimed by Britain's rulers of that day to have been 'saved from annihilation' at Munich, it was clear that Germany's new projects of territorial expansion were limitless, that she would very soon come into direct and open conflict with the one power that stood between her and their realization, Britain, and that, far from satisfying just grievances, she merely meant, before that great contest began, to subjugate the smaller potential allies of Britain

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on the other side of Europe — to avoid, at all costs, the thing she dreaded most, the 'war on two fronts'.

True, many people still remained in England who did not wish to see this. But it was patent to anybody with any schooling in the politics of Europe and it meant that, from the moment she had swallowed Czechoslovakia, Germany would abandon the policy of 'Saving Europe from Bolshevism', which had served her so well for the duping of the credulous and the panic-stricken in England, and would seek reconciliation with Soviet Russia, so that her entire strength would be free to use in the West when the moment came.

All Germans were convinced that the threat from Russia alone had deprived them of victory in 1914, when they came so near to Paris and the Channel Ports, and that even after that time they would easily have overcome France and Britain if they had not needed to keep millions of men on the Russian front; and by the time they had actually crushed Russia, in that war, the Americans were beginning to throw their weight into the struggle in the West.

The statesmen of Britain must have known this. From the moment of the annexation of Czechoslovakia the only chance of preserving *peace* in Europe was an agreement between Britain, France and Russia jointly to oppose the next German aggression.

But the preservation of *peace* — and this is the seeming paradox which nobody in Britain could understand — was the only way to prevent that further spread of Communism in Europe which so many people in this country so greatly feared.

If *war* came, it was bound to spread (and has now spread, to that part of Poland which Russia seized and to the Baltic States which Russia annexed; and the future contains the danger that it may spread to a defeated Germany).

In *peace*, it could not spread; twenty years of Communist decline, in all countries outside Russia, had proved that.

But the only chance of preserving *peace* was to confront Hitler with the certainty of that war-on-two-fronts which he feared above all things.

That was the one move which might have brought him to that



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ready-to-negotiate frame of mind which the British statesmen, as they said, so yearned to inspire in him, the one move which might have induced him to seat himself at that fair and square deal table where they so longed to meet him in conference, for the composition without the use of arms of 'Germany's just grievances'.

The British statesmen must also have known that from the period of the Spanish civil war, when Britain in effect furthered the success of the intervening dictators by the policy of 'non-intervention', the rulers of Russia had come to disbelieve that Britain meant ever to oppose Hitler; that their representative in Spain had openly declared that, in view of this, Soviet Russia would abandon her hopes of the all-in, collective-security-against-aggression policy, and would seek to strike a bargain with Hitlerist Germany rather than run the risk of being left alone, at the last, to face that mighty martial nation. They must have known, too, that from that time onward the dismissal of Litvinoff, the Soviet Foreign Minister identified with the 'collective security' policy, had been freely foretold by Soviet representatives, and when this actually happened, not long after the German seizure of Czechoslovakia, any doubts they may still have had must have disappeared.

In the spring of 1939, therefore, the only hope of preserving *peace* in Europe and preventing the further spread of Communism, strange though this may still seem to untutored minds, was to make an alliance with the plaguey Reds whom we had at great cost sought, and failed, to destroy after the 1914-18 war. The prospect was seemingly too horrible, to those minds in England which had so long browsed blissfully upon Hitler's promises to save them from Bolshevism, for it ever to have had any chance of realization. Not even they can have imagined that Russia had any warlike intentions against Britain; but the thought of that Bolshevik-beneath-the-bed was still more terrifying to them than the armed might of a much nearer country which desired the destruction of the British Empire, first, and after that world domination.

True, the instinct of the people in this country was surer. They did feel and see that we 'needed the Russians'; I satisfied myself

of that in my journeyings about England. And true, also, that the rulers of Britain equally admitted this necessity. The British Government, to begin with, gave guarantees, against new aggression to Poland and Rumania which had no meaning or value without the collaboration of Russia, the neighbour of these countries, and then, as was logical, began 'conversations' with Russia herself.

Mistrust and suspicion of Britain in Moscow were of much older date than the British attempts to propitiate Hitler, the potential slayer of the Red dragon, and even than the British attempt of 1919 to slay that dragon. They reached far back into Russian Imperial times. They had been lavishly fertilized, as I say, by the British policy in Spain. The allaying of these suspicions, the courting and winning of the detested Reds, was therefore not likely to be an easy task.

The 'conversations' were begun within five days of the German annexation of Czechoslovakia. They proceeded, but did not progress, for many weeks and months. Eventually the British Government, whose Prime Minister and Foreign Minister had been at such pains to seek Hitler out in his Berlin palace and Berchtesgaden fastness, sent to Moscow Mr. William Strang, an able but rather junior Foreign Office official.

That was in June, after the conversations had lasted more than two months. By the end of June a Soviet spokesman, one Zhdanoff, pointed out in *Pravda* that the conversations had been going on for seventy-five days, without result, and roundly accused the British, and French, conversationalists of a lack of sincerity. However, by August, with the British public still anxiously waiting, progress seemed to have been made, for the British Government sent a Military Mission to Moscow. This seemed to offer a faint hope that *peace* might yet be saved — by the threat of joint Anglo-French-Russian resistance to any new German venture.

A seemingly irrelevant detail convinced me at the time that these negotiations, too, would not succeed — the name of the leader of the British Mission. This was:

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Admiral  
the Honourable  
Sir  
Reginald  
Aylmer  
Ranfurly  
Plunkett-  
Ernle-  
Erle-  
Drax

and there were also some subsequent initials. I mean no disrespect to the bearer of this name, whom I never met and of whom I had not until that time heard: he is a brother of Lord Dunsany, and this indicates high intellectual attainments. But the name alone — if you picture it in Moscow — suggested the impossibility of making these two worlds meet, if they ever were meant to meet, even in an alliance to save the peace and avert war.

Imagine Soviet Under-Commissar Isador Aaronsky struggling with it! It is the very father and mother of a name — three titles, three forenames, four surnames, and three hyphens! I should think there was never another name in the world like it (though the queerest fates befall names in England, and the press about this same time told of a baby who had been born Ogilvie-Grant-Studley-Herbert, but who, when he was old enough, was to be renamed Studley-Herbert-Ogilvie-Grant). It just shows you what can happen to a name if you don't take care of it. A Frenchman might have proved equal to an encounter with this name; the French are dauntless people and in Paris its owner would have become plain Sir Drax. But the Bolsheviks have an especial inferiority complex (a term I use because everybody but myself seems to understand it) about this sort of thing; I could picture the Comrades in conclave, discussing how to address Admiral the Hon. Sir — well, you know whom I mean.

Anyway, plumb in the middle of these negotiations, which had now lasted over three months, a fleet of German aeroplanes landed in Moscow, bringing the good von Ribbentrop, the erst-

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while darling of Mayfair, with a suite of over thirty senior officials, and he signed Stalin on the dotted line, leaving the British Military Mission to retire unhonoured and unsung and by devious routes to England.

Within 48 hours of this, Hitler invaded Poland; within three weeks of that Poland was defeated and partitioned between Germany and Bolshevky; and we were at war.

When I read the news of that German-Bolshevist agreement, in the stop-press column of a London newspaper one morning (I am again forestalling my narrative a little for the sake of lucidity, I hope) I knew the last hope was gone. I had written in *Insanity Fair* that this would happen, if it were not prevented, and said: 'If Germany and Russia come together, peace in Europe is finished.'

Within a few hours of their coming together, peace *was* finished.

The move was clear to foresee, years ahead, to any moderate chess-player, but the British Government played chess as if it were dominoes. In spite of all warnings, this Nazi-Bolshevist agreement struck everybody in England, from the Prime Minister to the last Tory peer and member, all of a heap. Every child in Europe across the Channel had known that it would come unless it were checkmated. The Prime Minister of a remote Balkan country, for instance, M. Kiosseivanoff of Bulgaria, was able to foretell it exactly to the French Minister in Sofia on December 16th, 1938, according to the French Yellow Book:

M. Kiosseivanoff thought it unlikely that Germany would take advantage of her domination over Czechoslovakia to drive towards the south-east. He believed that Poland was in far greater danger. The rapprochement, then outlined, between Poland and Russia might serve to ward off the blow, but he did not think it would succeed; whereas a rapprochement between Germany and Russia seemed to him far more likely. Such, he recalled, had always been the dream of a section of the German General Staff. Should it come off, a fourth partition of Poland would be the result.

But Mr. Chamberlain, his Government, the British Press and the British public were thunderstruck. I cannot conceive, when I think of those days and re-read the speeches that were made and the articles that were written, how the British public is ever to be informed and educated about foreign affairs. That means that I do not see how wars are ever to be prevented.

When I look back, I cannot think that the pact with Russia, which might have averted *war*, preserved *peace*, and prevented the further spread of Bolshevism in Europe, was ever seriously intended. The embattled property-owners of England, as I think, allowed their strategic vision to be clouded by an obsession with 'the Red menace', and took the one course which might conceivably place them, one day, in real danger from that source. In *peace*, which might have been saved by an alliance with those distant Reds, it could never have approached them; but in *war*, who knows?

Apart from all that, peace was better worth having than war. I hold the imported, non-Russian, Bolshevik regime in Russia to be the one political racket in Europe more evil than National Socialism. But Russia, the State, the country, the nation, was a king-piece in the game of war or peace and, in our hands, adroitly played, would have won the match for peace.

The Bolsheviks (as distinct from the Russians) were on the down grade before the world war was resumed. Through our policy they have become, for the nonce at all events, 'mightier yet'.

Having watched, from various parts of Europe, the cruel and absurd things which were done from fear of 'the Reds' by men whose fear did not see far enough, I thought, when I came back to England in the spring of 1939, that the last chance of saving peace would be lost. As the summer drew on I became sure of it. The moving finger continued to write its stupid tale of inertia, senile misleadership, and peace betrayed.

## CHAPTER 7

### MRS. SUNSHINE

IN my native London, between the invasion of Prague and the resumption of the unpleasantness interrupted in 1918, I found not much that was reassuring, as the astute reader may have surmised. My chief source of consolation was my bed-and-breakfast landlady, in whose soul, despite stairs, stomach trouble, sore feet and a new class of lodger ('Them refugees!'), the most unbounded faith in England and everything English reigned. She was a stout woman of strong mind, which she freely spoke, and determined appearance, and yielded no inch of ground to my opinions about the slums, the derelict areas, the ignorance of the people or the cowardly propitiation of Hitler. She found everything in her world either right or unalterable; she held the upper classes in high esteem and the lower ones, her own, in some contempt. The idea that anything might be changed or bettered made her suspicious; she would not have needed much prompting to call this 'Bolshevism'. She liked to talk, when her inside or her feet were not paining her; when they were, she liked to talk too, but then she was most acid in her criticisms of my views.

I loved to draw her out. Over the breakfast tray we had many a give-and-take encounter, of a kind which I vainly sought in more moneyed society.

'Now, don't you go provoking me to-day,' she was wont to say, as she struggled pantingly in with my breakfast, 'or I'm liable to let my tongue run away with me again. My inside's fair turning over again.'

'That's all right, Mrs. Sunshine,' I would answer, 'there's many a true word spoken in indigestion.'

'Now don't you start that, Mr. de Bunker,' she would say (I had given her this foreign-sounding name in the vain hope that she would take me for a stranger to these shores and unburden herself

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in new vein), 'and don't get me arguing about the unemployed and the slums and suchlike, because I've enough bluddy trubble as it is,' (Mrs. Sunshine loved this adjective) 'what with all these stairs and my feet.'

'I know, Mrs. Sunshine, I know,' I said. 'Hell hath no fury like a woman's corns.'

'The trouble with you, Mr. de Bunker,' Mrs. Sunshine replied, standing back with her hands folded where her waistline had once been and looking aggressively down at my dishevelled hair and sleepy morning face, 'is that you've bin too long abroad.'

'How right you are, Mrs. Sunshine,' I said, 'the trouble with England is that I've been too long abroad.'

'I didn't say that, and my name isn't Sunshine,' she remarked sharply, 'but I think, if you don't mind my saying so, that you're too critical about us. There'll always be rich and poor, and . . .'

'And if you give them a bath they put coals in it,' said I.

'Pardon,' said she.

'Oh, nothing,' I said. 'I was just thinking that time flies and the world's a small place and its milder to-day, isn't it?'

'No,' said Mrs. Sunshine, contemplating me with disapproval but without surprise, 'it was milder yesterday.'

'Thank the Dalai Lama for that,' said I.

'Who's he?' said she.

'A brother of the Aga Khan,' said I.

'Oh, him,' said Mrs. Sunshine. 'Well, what's he got to do with it?'

'Well, who should have to do with it if not he?' I asked. 'He comes from a warm climate, doesn't he?'

Mrs. Sunshine looked me in the eye with the invulnerable composure which I admired, straightened the toast-rack, and said, 'Well, Mr. de Bunker, I think you're partly wrong in your ideas. I won't say you're not right in some of them, and when I see the way them refugees light their oil-stoves for cooking on my carpets, without even bothering to put a piece of cardboard under them, so that they burn holes everywhere, not to mention the lavatories, I think Hitler wasn't so far wrong in some things, but

## MRS. SUNSHINE

still, we've a lot to be thankful for, here in England, it don't do to pamper the poor. Look at our Royal Family.'

'How?' I asked.

'How what?' said she.

'How shall I look at them!' said I.

'Well, I mean to say, *look* at them,' she said. 'Look at the Queen, more like a friend to us all than a queen, she is, and the two little Princesses.'

'But how do you *look* at them?' said I.

'Well,' said Mrs. Sunshine, sharply, 'if you don't know what I mean, or don't want to know what I mean, go to the news-reel cinema, and look at them, there,' and she departed, banging the door.

'So you think I ought to take a look at England,' I said to Mrs. Sunshine one day.

'You certainly should, Mr. de Bunker,' she answered, removing the breakfast tray with emphasis. 'Right, I will,' I said, and I packed my bags.

I wonder what happened to Mrs. Sunshine. The next time I chanced to pass that way I saw only a gap where her house had been; it had been bombed. She was a good soul, and, being perfectly happy in her station and feeling that everybody else ought to be content with their lot, she certainly belonged to those whom the high-up ones delight to call 'the sturdy British working-classes'.



## CHAPTER 8

### NIGHT ERRANT

BEFORE I set out on my English journeys I had one last night to spend in London, my birthplace, and, hoping against hope, I went in search of some good investment which would return me a quick dividend in mirth, good company and good cheer.

It was an almost hopeless quest, because in London a man may spend anything save a night. The industries of entertainment and refreshment, as I found by comparing them with the things I had seen in other countries, had reached a low level of quality and taste which was inexplicable in the biggest and richest single settlement of human beings on this planet. To what end did so many human beings come together, I thought, if this was the result?

The nightscape of London, for instance, was hideous. I thought of the dark romantic beauty of the Place de la Concorde in Paris, of the gleaming, pin-pointed sweep of the Danube at Budapest, of the spacious and fragrant-smelling Vienna Ringstrasse in springtime, of the broad Wenceslas Place in Prague outlinned in light. Trafalgar Square or the Thames Embankment could have looked like these, yet the best offering to beauty that London-at-night would devise was the crazy medley of shrieking, bursting, hop-skip-and-jumping electric signs at Piccadilly Circus, which yelled to the gaping crowd, come to see 'the sights of London', that this, that and the other gin, whisky or port were nectar and that somebody's purgative would cleanse them of the after-effects of these health-and-strength-giving liquids.

It is a lugubrious comment on our times and the civilization for which we later began once more to fight that beauty only re-entered the night scene of London when the black-out fell upon the city; how many of its citizens, having their eyes freed

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from the blinding glare of the street-level, then discovered, as I did, that there are great and starry skies above, that the upper silhouette of some buildings is pleasant and inspiring?

I wonder that the people who plan our streets do not realize that light is like money. Squandered it is meaningless and yields nothing, neither delight nor satisfaction. But well used it can produce beauty and the solace of the mind.

As a conscientious friend of alcohol and anti-abstainer, I tried long, hard and often to accustom myself to the national beverages which were advertised in so many colours in Piccadilly Circus and which, if I may tell another inside story, have the reputation in other countries that they are above all the implacable enemies of male potency, but I never could enjoy them or forget my first love, wine. They always induced a slight retching in me. And I never could understand the laws which produced the sub-human conditions in which they had to be drunk. A man, said these laws, might only drink these liquids at certain hours — two or three hours in the middle of the day and two or three hours at night. I assumed, for the lack of any other explanation I could think of, that these laws, which were more typical than anything else I knew of the muddled thinking that prevailed in England, had been devised to prevent men from drinking too much of these things that were so loudly proclaimed to be good for them.

But in the fact a man, in the West End and the East End of London alike, could drink all through the twenty-four hours, if he wished. If he were rich, he simply ordered what he liked, when he liked, in the clubs or hotels to which his money gave him entry.

But even if he were not rich he could do the same, for these laws, as far as I understood them, allowed that the eight hours during which alcohol might be drunk could, in certain conditions and for certain 'clubs', be spread over other periods of the day than those at which the public houses and restaurants sold alcohol. Thus there were hundreds of little 'clubs', usually housed in two tiny rooms on an upper floor, where you might

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drink during the otherwise prohibited hours of the morning, afternoon or night. All you needed was to become 'a member', at a subscription of five shillings or so; and in the event you did not pay the five shillings. I knew a man who was 'a member' of so many of these that he could drink what he liked whenever he wanted it.

Good food, good wine, and good entertainment in cheerful surroundings, to be taken whenever you wished to take it, were things you could not obtain in that London of 1939. I never knew a city in which money seemed so autocratically to rule and yet bought so little; it would not purchase the things I have described.

I remembered, as I wandered about London, a time in Vienna when I had very few of these metal discs, when I had to count every penny, or rather every Schilling, 26 of these Schillings being the equivalent of each 20 of my English shillings. I remembered a gay evening spent in the company of a very good friend who knew my plight and set herself, in the Rathauskeller there, to choose a good meal for the two of us at the lowest possible price. Good food and plenty of it; half-a-litre of good wine; music; and we did it for five Schillings and seventy Groschen, including the tip. O memorable meal, unforgettable evening, and unforgotten good friend!

On this night errant, when I set out to explore the town for the last time, as I rightly thought, before the war began again, I was in that strange mood of a man who, expecting neither hilarity nor comfort from this, was determined to get drunk — for of all the fallacies I know the greatest is that a man may drown his cares; if I have any, they grow and grow, like a balloon that is being blown out, when I drink.

Nevertheless, I knew that I should do this. My mood, at all events, belonged to me alone; nobody else could have had one quite like it. First, I felt like a stranger in this home-town of mine, where pleasant and agreeable conversation seemed to be unknown, because everybody looked at his neighbour as if he suspected that man of carrying a bomb in his pocket. And

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then, I was a man who had come out of a war more than twenty years before much reduced in health and penniless, and for many years had worked hard to achieve a simple ambition — to be able to work and play hard in free and open-air surroundings of the kind I liked, beneath a trustworthy sun, among mountains and rivers, to get really fit in body and mind and so to produce something really good. Now, when I was at long last in a position to be able to do this, I was back again in my native land, with a new war looming immediately ahead, and all the doors to intellectual and physical freedom closing again, and heaven knew if or when I should be able to return to those icy mountain streams, those alpine meadows, that way of life which I loved. And worst of all, I had seen this coming for so long, and had spent so much strength in trying to avert it.

When the curse eventually came upon us it was much less awful than I feared; it was even exhilarating, after the first period of dire suspense, and, strangest of all, I even found in London, pitch dark and stricken and lifeless, delights which I never discovered in peacetime London of the drink-and-be-purged advertisements. But that was something that I could not have foreseen. The waiting-for-the-blow-to-fall was much worse than the blow, when it fell, and on this night errant in the summer of 1939 my mood of angry and impotent despair reached its blackest depth.

At random I wandered into a music-hall, and pallid memories of 1914 awoke in me when I found myself listening to a troubadour who sang to me that there would always be an England and England would be free as long as England meant to me what England meant to him, and for all I know he was right, though I feared from his face that England did not mean to him just what England meant to me. Behind him, in a dapper semicircle, sat silver-clad saxophonists, swarthy in feature but radiant with patriotism; and behind them, again, the backcloth darkened and darkened, while a transparent oval in it, above their heads, grew progressively lighter and revealed, behind the gauze, a girl in a long white garment with large and visibly moth-eaten property

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wings fixed to her shoulders and a Union Jack in her hands. All blood, save mine, tingled in response to this symbolism, and the storm of cheering raged around my head. From my seat I could see, in the wings, the stage-manager, a man of foreign aspect, yawning.

The brave music of a *distant* drum. I listened awhile to songs about ododeodo and Ohio and Idaho and Mexico and came away from this theatre, musing about the British music-hall. Once, later, in a dressing-room of another theatre, I saw a notice put up by the management urging the players to refrain from making 'blue jokes' on the stage; I do not know when the word blue obtained this meaning, but the notice went on to say 'Remember that anybody can get a laugh with a dirty gag but it takes an artiste to get a laugh with a clean one'.

This, I thought, was a fairly acute comment on the general condition of the British music-hall stage, and as I came away that night I thought of an evening not long after the 1914-18 war when I saw Harry Lauder carry an entire performance—a whole evening!—with his songs about hills and heather, about roaming in the gloaming, about the wee house in the glen, and the like. That achievement certainly needed an artist, and I well recalled the unflagging applause which greeted him at the beginning, all through, and at the end.

Then I went to dine. There was, somewhere in London, at that time, an Austrian restaurant. The waiters were mostly Italian and the band predominantly Jewish, but there were pictures on the walls of the vineyards at Grinzing—and they had a little Austrian wine, which connoisseurs, I believe, might spurn, but which I like. The band played Viennese tunes. I rested my eyes dreamily on those wall-paintings, drank my wine, and thought and thought of perfumed evenings in those wine-gardens, beneath the lilac, of the songs and the good company, of the homeward stroll, or roll, laughing and talking, with my good friend.

I was, I began to perceive as the level of the wine in my bottle sank, a badly-used man. 'Here am I, sweating, sick and hot...'

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— good heavens, I thought, I must be getting drunk, that song has quite another application.

I ordered my second bottle, and considered, within its glassy walls, the sparkle of sunshine on the Danube. Suddenly I noticed that I was quietly, I still hope quietly, singing *Wien, Wien, nur du allein*, to the music of the band. 'Ah, then you *are* drunk,' I told myself, for I knew that this was a sure sign.

But things moved quickly — they do, when I am at that stage — and while I was still reproving myself I found that the band was putting away its instruments, that I was the last guest, and that the waiter was asking if he could remove my bottle, which was still half-full, as it was 'after hours'. 'Oh no,' said I, firmly, and drank that half-bottle at a swallow, which is imprudent.

Then, floating on some magic carpet, but navigating with the sure instinct of a drunken man, I found myself on the other side of Piccadilly, with no recollection of the voyage, in one of those places which, for some reason, are allowed to sell alcohol, with a sandwich, for an hour after hours.

And here, for the first and last time in London, I found good company. I bemusedly observed a man, who seemed to know everybody in the place, looking fixedly at me, and at length he came up to me and asked if he could draw my portrait, at the cost of half-a-crown. He was an extremely good-looking fellow, with a head that seemed to have been cut out of a Rembrandt canvas, and I liked him immediately. His manners were good, his speech that of a cultured man, and he looked very poor: I had in my pocket enough left of that large sum, in pieces of paper, which was necessary, in London, to purchase a little food and drink. Here was my good companion!

I would have done anything for him, save let him draw my portrait. But with the gravity of a well-wined man I studied the sheaf of other portraits he carried in his hand and was enormously impressed, as men in that condition are wont to be, with a half-finished sketch of a woman's head, a woman ageing, tired, all illusions gone, with closed eyes. I asked him who and

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what she was. Oh, he said indifferently, she was a lady of pleasure whose face had struck his eye as she sat back in her chair, weary, in some pub just before that hour of the clock which is known, in England, as chucking-out time. 'But this man is a genius', I thought portentously to my befuddled self as I looked at the sketch. I bought it, feeling secure in my connoisseurship. I wonder where it is now? I remember that the one constant thought that remained in my mind for the rest of that night was that I must on no account lose it. But I never found it again.

'And now, sir,' I said, as the relentless hands of the clock strangled the last minute of that extra hour, 'let us continue on our way together. Let us go and drink.'

'Willingly,' he said, 'but where?'

'Let us go to one of those places where the platinated youth of this town foregathers when it has been chucked out of all other places,' I said, 'to a night club, bottle party or whatsit.'

'Are you a member of any such?' he asked.

'No,' I said.

'Then how will you get in?' said he.

'To-night nothing shall keep me out,' I said, 'for I am a free-man, as I am told, and this is my last night in my native city. Come with me and I will show you how to become a lawbreaker.'

So, using the magic carpet again, we went, and presently found ourselves confronting a gigantic doorkeeper and a woman in a little office at the head of the steps leading down to that cellar where the night club known as the Elysian Fields has its home.

'I was here once before and was thrown out,' murmured my Rembrandt cavalier in my ear. 'I doubt whether this is wise.'

'Fear not,' said I. 'Leave this to me.'

'Are you a member?' inquired the woman in the office.

'I believe I was once made one,' I said, 'but I have been long abroad and have lost my membership card. I assure you that I am clean and sweet, and a British subject, if that is no disqualification, and most eligible for admittance to this decorous resort.'

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'What is your name?' she said.

'Levy,' said I.

She ran her finger along her card index; quite a number of the cards were inscribed with this name.

'And what is your address?' she asked.

'I forget at which hotel I was staying when I qualified,' I said. 'It might have been the Blitz or the Saveloy or even the Gorgester.'

She looked again. 'Would it be Mr. A. Levy of the Palestine Strand Hotel?'

'It probably would be,' I said. 'I can think of nothing more likely, and this is my friend.'

'Seven shillings and sixpence each, please,' she said; and we passed down.

'Now, brother in crime,' I said when we were seated, 'what will you drink? Don't bother to tell me, because here you may drink only whisky, and we are both men of taste, or a liquid which is served in champagne bottles and costs twice as much as the best champagne, but never saw that district in France where the champagne grape grows, and of these two evils I prefer the lesser and more expensive, so I shall order a bottle of Mummery.'

It came, and the four of us began to drink it. The four of us? Yes, undoubtedly the four of us, for by this time, I know not where or how, we had made fresh friends.

Somehow, they had swum into our ken, had joined us on the magic carpet. I can still see them through the haze that surrounds that night, a very queer pair. The man wore the uniform of some merchant navy and was, he told me, a Finnish sea captain; I thus assumed that he knew all the Seven Seas, yet he seemed a very city-wise man, much at home in that place and well versed in its ways. But for the uniform I would have put him down as a typical denizen of the half-world, a man knowing more of May-fairing than seafaring, a hanger-on of trollops and bottle-parties. His wife, too, who spoke with the kind of accent that made you ask yourself, 'What is this woman, is she American or Canadian or Cockney or what?', knew many countries and seemed to have



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experienced many things in them. You felt that, however much you told her, you could tell her nothing.

A strange couple and I still wonder, what was their racket?

By this time I had reached the stage, which is known, I suppose, to many, where I congratulated myself on my consummate resistance to the assaults of alcohol. My wit and my perception, I remarked with gratification, had never been clearer.

I was only sorry to see that the Finnish captain and my artist were drunk. The artist persisted in dancing with the dancing-girls, and I saw that he did not dance well. The Finnish captain was inclined to be pugnacious and jealous and to reproach me for the attentions his wife was paying to me. As I was the only sober man there, it was natural that she should turn to me, I thought, and I congratulated myself again on being so sober that I still retained a wary feeling about her and could not understand why she kept showing me photographs of an unclothed lady whom she claimed to be her daughter.

I suddenly realized that I had been wrong about London. It was the gayest place, filled with charming people, whose only fault was that they *would* drink rather too much. Other ladies appeared about me, and I was amazed to see how beautiful they were, how witty, though all unfortunately just a little tipsy, how exquisitely gowned they were and what perfect figures those dresses covered. I was enchanted by each of them and felt more than once that, after a lifetime of blindness, I had suddenly opened my eyes and found my soul-mate standing before me, but then, all at once, they were gone, and the Finnish captain, disgustingly inarticulate in his speech, was there again, grumbling about something or other, and his wife, on my other hand, was squeezing my hand to some end that I could not understand but still suspected.

And then, quite suddenly again, my mind cleared and I saw that I, who had thought myself so sober, had in reality been drunk, but now I *was* sober and perceived quite clearly that life was real and life was earnest and all this was an alcoholic frivol without wit, unworthy of grown men and, finding that the artist

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had somehow reappeared, we plunged, with furrowed brows and portentous mien and wagging forefingers, into a most serious discussion about art. We agreed that art in England was in the doldrums, that the Royal Academy was a joke, that the only artist of outstanding merit in the country was Sickert, whose name was hardly known to one Englishman in a thousand, and then, somehow, the magic carpet took possession of us and, arm in arm together, the handsome pauper and I, with the dawn breaking, we were standing and swaying, like daffodils in the breeze, at the top of Regent Street, united in rapt contemplation of a pillar box which I had discovered.

The uppermost thought in my mind was astonishment that I had never noticed that pillar box before, and the artist fully understood, as an artist should, this feeling of mine and pointed out beauties that I had overlooked.

'Here is our soulmate,' I cried. 'Look at this stately and full-bellied guardian of the street corners! Look at that colour, the hue of warm passion and the Coldstream Guards! Here is a twin soul, a Red! Look at that wide and generous mouth, the loveliest I have seen to-night, which I long to kiss,' and, taking the pillar box in my two arms, I did salute it, while the artist gravely watched. Then, raising our hats and bowing, we left it, and, summoning the magic carpet again, presently arrived at my room, for during the course of this evening I had learned that the artist had nowhere to sleep and had put my sofa at his disposal.

In the corner of my room, hidden by a screen, was a wash-basin, and the artist went towards it, to wash his hands, as I said, 'Now I will go and tell Mrs. Sunshine to bring breakfast for two and coffee for one, or whatever the saying is', and the artist, steadying himself with one hand on the screen, turned and said, 'But you cannot wake that good lady at this hour' and as he said this he fell, pulling the screen with him so that it fell atop of him, and he lay, dignified but unable to rise, with only his head, hands and feet showing.

'Friend,' I said, cautiously trying to help him, for I was anxious not to fall myself, feeling that if we both were down we should

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neither be able to get up again, 'you look exactly like a tortoise.'

'I wish I were, and could carry my house with me,' he said, composing himself to remain upon the floor, 'and by the way, I have wanted to ask you all the evening what you do?'

'I write,' said I.

'Oh, then you too are an artist,' he said.

This remark, from the beak of the tortoise, really did sober me. 'You have had too much to drink, Rembrandt,' I said. 'If I were an artist I should be as poor as you are. I just write. Come on, get up,' and I removed his shell and helped him up and he washed his hands.

'And now to bed,' I said, 'for we have only an hour or two to sleep and to-morrow, I mean to-day, I must be on my way again, and there is a war coming which has been on my mind all this night, blast it, so good-night.'

'Good morning,' he said, and we went to sleep.

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CHAPTER 9

OPEN ROAD

I HAVE a passion for knowledge and am happy to be able to corroborate, after my far English journeys, all that has been said or implied about the Open Road. I travelled great distances, and found it entirely open; not once, in peacetime, did I encounter a bar, barrier or barricade across it.

The country on either side of it was hedged, fenced, railinged, palinged, palisaded, walled and wired; but the Road itself was indisputably open, and I am ready to call out any Red, Pole, or Bolsh, or other ignorant foreigner, who in my hearing should revive those ancient calumnies about our English Road and deny that it is open. It is as open as justice is impartial, and if any man doubt this let him induce a Duke to steal a loaf of bread; he will be punished with exactly the same rigour as a pauper who commits the same offence.

The countryside through which the Open Road ran *did* seem to me to be excessively guarded. The manufacture of railings must be one of the major industries of England and I wonder that no book has ever been written about this gigantic undertaking. In London, for instance, half a dozen flagstones in front of a town house are customarily enclosed by an array of pikes and halberds well able to disembowel a herd of elephants, if any should try to browse on the flagstones.

In the countryside these fortifications take various forms, but the common wish of all country-dwellers is seemingly to safeguard themselves by every conceivable means against the attacks of some mysterious foe. The houses of rich men are enclosed within veritable Siegfried Lines of brick, timber, wire, glass splinters and vegetation, and the desire seems to be completely to shut out the world, and even Death himself, if that were but possible, but

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this Red will unfortunately seek you out and destroy you even in the Fortunate Isles.

This hedged-aboutness of England is the thing that distinguishes it most from all the other countries I know, where, as soon as you leave a town behind you, you may always strike out left or right from the road (which is usually, by a strange coincidence, also open). In many parts of England that I came to know you are for long distances as much the prisoner of the road as you are in the city. I found country towns where the inhabitants, as far as I could tell, might pass their lives and hardly ever tread on grass.

It is, indeed, most difficult for an Englishman to tread his native heath, and the feel of asphalt underfoot does not move me to cry, 'This is my own, my native land . . .' People write to me to say 'But you forget the Lake District, the New Forest, Dartmoor . . .' I don't; but they are far distant and far apart. This is a very queer thing about England, and neither the need to safeguard crops or prevent cattle straying fully account for it, for there are more crops and more cattle in some of the other countries I have in mind.

I travelled England far and wide, eventually, from the villa-country of the South to the atrocious slums of Liverpool and Sheffield. I was astonished to find how urban the countryside had become, how fast the last traces of 'English country life', as the engravings and novels of former times show it to us, were disappearing in 'This England' of to-day. The small craftsman and tradesman, the smith, the glovier, the haberdasher, the grocer, were dying out.

Everywhere the great chain-store, where nothing cost more than so-many-pence, and woolworth it, was spreading its tentacles into provincial city, town and township. The ownership and control of these great concerns was anonymous. Were they British, were they alien, no man knew.

The main instruments of reaching to the minds of the people, the film and the radio, reached into the remotest hamlet and cot; the one was predominantly alien-controlled, and no clear British thread ran through the emissions of the other.

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The farmer's boy no longer answered 'Ay' or even 'Yes', but only 'Okey-doke' — and he was only a farmer's boy because he was not clever enough to be an errand-boy, cinema doorkeeper or whatnot. A farmer, bitterly complaining of the state of the countryside, once said to me: 'Only the fools become farm labourers to-day', and it was true. The work was the hardest and worst paid in the country.

Even the bread, the cakes and the pies that country people ate, nowadays, had often come roaring down from London a few hours before in the delivery-vans of the chain-teashop concerns.

True, the English countryside that I explored was thriving. The main industry of that countryside seemed to be the sale of refreshments: you could hardly see the woods for the teas. Never had the farmers sold so many beds-and-breakfasts, so many cups of tea, so many camping-places for trailer-caravans; and they also did a little farming.

Country pursuits flourished: everybody pursued something, either foxes, pheasants and fish, in their season, or balls of various shapes and sizes.

One perfect early summer's day, cold, windy and wet, I saw the Ascoteers; and had been long enough away from England to marvel as, on the eve of a new war, those long lines of limousines, with their top-hatted and expensively-gowned passengers, flashed past me in remote country lanes and sleepy villages, coming from all parts of the realm.

The most depressing thing was the amount of land which had been relinquished to the tussock and thistle. I have seen nothing like it elsewhere, yet even these waste acres were barricaded as if gold grew on the surface there. The sight of hundreds of acres of the best farm land in the world, lying derelict and fallow, was one I encountered often enough, and it was a bitter one.

This, the appalling slums in the cities, and the derelict areas, were the result of victory in one World War. If we fail to learn that lesson of the between-war years, and fall back after the

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present war into the lassitude and senile apathy about such things that marked those years, we are worse than mad.

It is amazing that so great a country and so great a nation, which is so sound at core, should be lulled and doped by golf and the pictures and radio and three-card-tricks in Parliament and all the other narcotics into deliberate oblivion of such things.

It is appalling to think that the state of Germany, as I saw that country after a world war lost, acre for acre and street for street and house for house, was far better than the condition of England. Is *that* to happen again? Where is the rhyme or reason in it?

Though the farmers knew of these things, though even I, a journalist abroad, knew of them, the authorities seemingly did not, for not long after I returned to England the then Minister of Agriculture, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, told a newspaper, after 'a 200-mile tour of derelict farms,' that 'I am amazed. It is astonishing that such a thing could happen in England to-day'. He had been shown, said the newspaper, '280 acres of one-time fat meadows and well-filled barley fields choked with nettles and thorn bushes', and the site of 'a pleasant seven-bedroom mansion where the owner once lived, but which has now disappeared, nobody quite knows how or where. People have taken it away piecemeal in motor-cars, hand carts and perambulators'. And he was told, according to the same newspaper, that in Suffolk alone there were '15,853 derelict acres and 1,232 sets of farm-buildings in need of repair'.

The result of this, quite apart from the desolation and degeneration of the countryside, was that by 1941 the Minister of Food, declared that the danger to our food supplies was far worse than it was in the crisis year of 1917 (when leading statesmen thought we should have to sue for peace with Germany). We knew, he said, what a struggle we had had with the submarine in that year of the last war, but we had steadily gone on importing more than half of what we had eaten. We had not taken seriously enough the most urgent and wise requests of the Ministry of Agriculture that we should make every bit of our land produce food for us.

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'Urgent and wise requests' are not enough. A policy is needed. The farmers and the farm labourers alike need to be helped to restore the English countryside and English agriculture to its former state.

When the new war began we had five million more mouths to feed and two-and-a-half million acres less under cultivation than in 1914, and most of these acres had gone into derelict acres and rough grazings.

The population engaged in agriculture had dwindled until it represented only about five per cent of the total occupied population. The farmers, urged on to a great effort in the last war, had been left in the lurch after that war.

The result was that the English countryside in 1939, when I looked at it, presented a drearily disconsolate picture, that made humbug of the selected snapshots ('This England') with which the newspapers decorated their columns and the railway companies their stations. On the one hand farming in decline. On the other the great walled-in expanses of rich men's parkland, with the stately home just visible in the far distance.

The thing I particularly noticed, as I say, was the dearth of common land, of free native heath for freemen to tread. Where is, in this matter, that freedom for which we later came again to fight? The 'rights of property' is a well-worn phrase. But how many of those great estates were once common land, taken and enclosed without a by-your-leave to make deer parks and the like.

The 'right of property' can only be invoked, in many of these cases, in the sense that possession is nine points of the law. Consider, for instance, one of the biggest such estates in the vicinity of London — Trent Park — one thousand acres of good rolling farmland, near Barnet. It was once public land, taken in this way, and later given by George III to his favourite physician, Sir Richard Jebb, who immediately sold it, and by the time I returned to England it had passed, by sale and resale, sale and resale, into the possession of the late Sir Philip Sassoon.



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'Freedom'! A thing easier to fight for than to define.

I saw a deal of farmers and farming, when I came back to England. A healthy countryside and a thriving agricultural population are the essential conditions of a country that means to remain healthy. In England the small farmer — the peasant, as he would be called abroad — is almost extinct, and this is a tragedy, for he, the man who owns a few acres and a small house, is the strongest foundation a country can have. Most of the English farmers are tenant-farmers, and I found, to my initial surprise, that they did not wish to own land; they preferred to rent it, because the landlord would then be responsible for taxes and upkeep.

This, I suppose, is why so many farmhouses and farm-buildings in England are in such wretched repair. The whole system of taxation in England needs revising, to encourage the farmer to own his farm and land.

My English journeyings began, at that time, with the Aldershot Tattoo and ended, because of a road accident, at Plymouth. I went full of eagerness to the Aldershot Tattoo because, having the ever-present thought of Hitler and his legions and his impending onslaught on England in my mind, I wanted to see what sort of impression our own soldiers made.

The Tattoo, as a show, was excellent. Here was a magnificent arena from which, by some chance, you could not see a house, only green vistas reaching Londonwards and overhung by an evening sky. I watched it with a German acquaintance, an exile, and as the Guards, in their white drill-jackets, came marching down the searchlit path into the arena, he drew a deep breath and said: 'Hitler would bust if he could see that.' Yes, I thought, the Guards are superlative — but how few we have of them!

After them came the horse-gunners, musically-riding, and, directly beneath my nose, I saw a nightmare picture, still clearly silhouetted in my mind's eye, of one team riding full-tilt into another, of galloping horses climbing over each other, of soldiers flying like dummy figures through the air, of gun-carriages

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rocketing, bouncing and overturning in clouds of dust. The lights went; silence fell; and I pictured to myself broken men and horses writhing in the darkness, for it was a mighty crash. There was an expectant and anxious pause. Then the lights went on again. All had been cleared away. A detached voice in the loudspeaker said 'The musical ride will continue.'

I thought to myself: 'Isn't that inhuman, isn't that carrying the *sangfroid* tradition too far?' But afterwards the voice announced that no horses had been hurt, miraculously, and only one gunner, slightly, and on second thoughts I was impressed. This was, perhaps, the strongest and best of the British character, the spirit that later enabled the country to survive where no other, I think, would have survived.

So I came to Plymouth, which I had never seen but always aimed to visit, because it embodied for me the things in British history that I most cherished, because, as I thought, the time was coming when we would need Drake again — not only Drake, the Armada-destroyer, but the spirit of Drake, of a sturdy and simple and fearless Britain.

Drake! That was a man, and that was a name, is a name. With all the meretricious shadow-shows that flicker across our screen, I do not remember that a film has ever been made of Drake. Perhaps it is as well; they would probably have him doing the booms-a-daisy with a gang of Glamour Girls on Plymouth Hoe.

The Hoe, with that magnificent bay before it, with the ghostly sails of the Armada still catching the sun in the distance, is one of the few really inspiring places I found in England. Incidentally the man with a taste for meditation may let his fancy play about the remarkable inscriptions on the Armada memorial and the monument to the Plymouth men who died in the last war. The one says: 'He blew with his winds and they were scattered.' The other says: 'The trumpets sounded for him on the other side.'

The Hoe is firm and reassuring and uplifting, as long as you turn your face seaward. But turn your back on it and come down

## THE PIPING TIMES

into Plymouth, and all the dubious thoughts return. Not even the ghost of Elizabethan England, of stout British oak and wrought iron and clean victuals and good liquor, remains in this shoddy and shabby town of chrome and nickel-plate and mass-produced-gents-natty-suitings and stand-up-pubs and six-penny-bazaars and ashtrays-made-out-of-H.M.S.-Victory and poached-egg-on-chips. The contrast hit me in the eye everywhere I went in England. It was sad.

Here and there, in my English journeys, I spoke to audiences who had invited me to speak to them, still cherishing the hope that I might convince people that war was coming fast upon them, and that I might thus still help to avert it. How vain, and even ridiculous that hope looks in retrospect!

I came, for instance, into East Grinstead, on a lovely summer's evening, and talked to such an audience, only to find that it was divided, as if by a knife, into two groups — those who thought that Mr. Chamberlain had secured Peace In Our Time, and those who thought the opposite. Nothing, I felt, would have brought a single convert from the one group to the other, and at the end an elderly gentleman arose and said in his opinion Mr. Reed had come there to put the wind up old people and he didn't think this was right.

And I spent a most agreeable evening, once, at the Staff College, talking to the future commanders of Britain's army. They were either too polite to show that they were bored or they were more receptive, I am still not sure which. I only know that the taxi back to town, the last train having gone, made the evening an expensive one for me.

But about this time I had to interrupt my journeys, through an untoward adventure on the road.

## CHAPTER 10

### AND BETTY MARTIN

I TURNED a corner in the Open Road, saw a lorry a foot distant from my headlights, woke up, and found a universe filled with turnips. Turnip-time, I thought bemusedly. I never saw so many turnips. I would not have believed there were so many turnips in the world. That lorry carried a load of turnips.

Then I saw, through the mist, a face I knew, with the eyes closed and a trickle of blood running from the nose and mouth. Her head lay in another woman's lap, who had come running to the spot. My heart sank deeper than it had ever sunk. Is she dead, I thought. I staggered over and spoke her name. She did not answer. I spoke it again. She whispered something. 'What?' I said. 'My handbag,' she whispered. Thank God, I thought, and I found it among the wreckage of the car.

Some moron, I fancy, once opined that experience is beyond price, and if that be true, the experience I gained, at that turning in the open road, of English hospitals, medicine, police methods and court procedure may have been worth a great deal. My overcoat disappeared from the wreck, and was never seen again, and no representative of the law ever had a theory about that. But the law had a theory about the crash, which was that my car, which lay piled on my side of the road with a lorry four times as heavy as itself on top of it, also turnips, had been on the wrong side of the road and caused the accident; somehow, after causing it and wrecking the much heavier lorry, on the other side of the road, my wrecked car had pulled the wrecked lorry, including the turnips, back to the hedge on my side of the road and piled the whole lot up there.

I once had a very minor crash — the only one in many years of driving — in Austria, inefficient Austria. I had to appear with the other driver, an Austrian, before a judge who was not only

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a professional jurist, but a trained expert in traffic accidents, with which alone he dealt. He studied the diagram of the brake-tracks at the scene of the collision, which at my request the police had made (I was not unconscious, that time), put four questions, knew the facts forthwith, and fined the other man. I am of the opinion that the system in this country, by which drivers appear before civilian justices who may be good soldiers or foxhunters or tradesmen, but who have no specialized knowledge and are entirely dependent on the local police, is in my experience a bad one. In my particular case, the mouse was convicted of attacking the cat with a solemnity which rather reminded me of the Reichstag Fire Trial.

But anyway, there I was, and when I really woke up I was in the ward of an Infirmary, which as I understand my mother tongue means a hospital for paupers or near-paupers. The regimen was strict, and the elderly men who lay in many of the beds around me were assisted to perform their natural functions, behind screens, at given times. I would rather rot under a hedge than lie in such a place. But I was not there long before a voice told me that I was not 'eligible' to stay there, which meant, I suppose, that I had been discovered to be not a pauper. As I had no intention to stay, if I could but stand, and had said so, this was agreeable to me, and at a bound I ascended, in the English manner, from third-class to first-class — a private ward.

There, in the open window, I saw the reflection of a cathedral tower, with pigeons circling round it. Years before, just after the War called Great, I had lain on the grass near that Cathedral, watched the pigeons circling round the tower. Seldom in my life had I been more miserable than in that unfriendly town — and now, after twenty years, I was back in it. After twenty years, I knew again things I had forgotten, since the last war: the pain that will not allow you either to move or lie still, the sleepless nights.

And, in the looking-glass, that cathedral-tower, which had always remained in my memory as a symbol of Christian uncharity and unfriendliness. I don't know what it is about cathedral

towns, but they always seem to me to exude an especial chill. When you arrive in Exeter, by train, a notice painted in letters yards high on the wall of a red-brick house warns you to prepare to meet your God, as if the traveller should expect to hear the Last Trump sound the moment he sets foot on the platform. But my experience is not that you are likelier to meet God in cathedral towns.

This picture-in-the-looking-glass I saw only with one eye. My other eye was closed up. In the hand-mirror I saw the finest black eye of all time. A surrealist master seemed to have cut a square three inches from the hide of an elephant, painted it as only a surrealist master can, and glued it on to my face. With admiration and astonishment I contemplated, in the hand-mirror, the thing of many colours that had alighted on my face, which I had had a long time and come to love. Whence had it come? Whither would it go?

There is something about a black eye, though acquired in the most innocent manner and worn, as in my case, by the most righteous of men, that gives its wearer a sinister and villainous look, startling to young children and animals. It was my lot to acquire, temporarily, the very father and mother of all black eyes. Not for me the scar honourable or romantic. In the war, the Germans had got me in a spot which ought to be placed out of bounds by the Queensbury rules of international warfare; it was in the back, it was below the belt, and what could be fouler than that? And now — this black eye, at the sight of which all the international heavyweights of our time would have stood aside in respectful and reverent awe, at which surgeons shied and hardened hospital orderlies started.

I could hardly believe, when I contemplated it in the mirror, that an eye, a window of the soul, existed behind that mound of multi-coloured flesh — for this eye was only by courtesy black; actually, black was the least of its hues, it was a symphony in blue, green, yellow and purple.

Doctors came, saw — and ordered me an enema, which made me thankful that my injury was not in the place chosen by the

## THE PIPING TIMES

Germans, or they might have removed my eye. When I protested, they said, 'It will clear your head'. 'I'd rather have a bad head,' said I. They smiled their best bedside smiles and I thought I was safe, but no. And by these presents I hereby bequeath and vow, or do whatever is necessary in the requisite legal jargon, that if any pert, white-aproned, half-fledged nursling ever comes near me with one of those things again I will not be responsible for anything I say or do.

But that eye! O beate Martine! Oh Betty Martin, patron saint of all sceptics! Oh, my eye!

When it eventually opened, I could not see with it, and I was out of that hospital, and in London, by ambulance, quicker than you could say aye-aye.

But nowt could be done. I was sorry for my eye. We had been to many places and done many things together. It had been a good eye to me, more like a friend than an eye. It had seen Queen Victoria, I believe, though it was not sure about that; King Edward; King George; Dan Leno; the Kaiser; the War Called Great; Hindenburg; Edward-Wales-Windsor; the next King George and his Queen (before they were King and Queen); it had looked down upon the Germans from the air, looked out upon them from the trenches; it had feasted itself on the sights of Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Bucharest, Sofia, Belgrade, Moscow, and many other places; it had glared malevolently at Hitler; it had registered severe scepticism about Mr. Chamberlain; it had beamed upon Kitchener, French and Foch; it had bleared in smokebound bars in many a foreign city, and glistened when it beheld the snowbound mountains of Austria and Switzerland.

A good eye, and now its day was done, for it would never see more than a blur again. I felt sorry for my eye, and took it here and there, to show it things, but it could not see them properly, and though it wagged its tail and was grateful, it could not really savour these delights.

The episode of my eye was irritating to me. I had never intended to let the Pursuer of all men catch me at his pleasure,

## AND BETTY MARTIN

and this time he had tapped me on the shoulder. I had no objection to settling his account in due course, but strongly objected to being dunned by him for something on account. Nor was I attracted by the idea of paying him in instalments, as I seemed in danger of doing. Not even the thought of the thrill of paying the last instalment could reconcile me to this system, which I had always detested in other transactions.

However, this feeling passed. Model of constancy though I am, I quickly forgot my eye and got on so well with the other that soon I hardly remembered that long friendship, so abruptly interrupted at a turning in the open road.



## CHAPTER I I

### WHITE HOUSE

Just before I received the dot on my eye I had found that tiny cottage, very old, very dilapidated, very dark, in its overgrown garden. It had no light, and no other water than that from a well. Just enough time remained, before the war came, to have it altered into the English home I wanted to have when the war came. From its windows I could see the Channel, the stretch of water from which Drake had sailed forth to smash the Armada, to which the captive Napoleon had been brought — the stretch of water that had so often been our salvation in ages past. Would it avail us now?

No need of an architect. I knew what I wanted and there were still good master builders in England. Gradually the interior was transformed, the windows widened and deepened, the yard-thick old walls given an outer covering of white, a green roof put on top. When it was finished, tiny though it was, it was perfect. Inside, at all events, was England. The rooms and the garden were one day to ring with the laughter of English children — not my own, *leider Gottes*, but still English children, from the slums, who were to find safety and health and loving care here.

A strange little house. Everything in it had grown, directly, out of my years in Europe; they were either things I had collected and succeeded in salvaging, or things I had bought with the money my books about the coming war had earned me.

It was finished just before the war came. I knew just what I intended to do with it if the Germans came, as they seemed likely to come, the devil take them and their incorrigible love of making war. From the garden and the house I often gazed at the sea and wondered in what form they would come. They had changed my whole life and career, kept me chasing about hither and

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thither. Would they even take this, which was all I had, take England?

I knew that the last chapter in the drama I had been watching was at hand. If they took England all was over. Meanwhile, my eye constantly on that stretch of water, I settled down to wait.



PART TWO

NEW WARS FOR OLD



## CHAPTER I

### DEAR FRIENDS, ONCE MORE!

ON the 3rd of September, 1939, we flung ourselves, once more, into the breach. For years it had been called a golden gateway leading to appeasement, friendship with Germany, and peace; now, suddenly, it was a gap in the ramparts of honour, freedom, democracy, civilization and whatnot which had to be manned and held at all costs. New Wars for Old!

I felt as if I were in a room filled with old men and with mirrors on all sides, so that their faces were repeated in endless facsimile — Baldwin, Ramsay MacDonald, Chamberlain, Simon, Hoare, Lord Broadacres and Lord Coalmine and Lord Dailydope, Sir Puffin Tory, Colonel Dividend, and all the rest of that cackling coterie.

A chamber of horrors and mirrors! Loudspeakers blared into it the phrases with which they had filled the years between the old war and the new: 'Germany is *not* rapidly approaching air equality with us; her real strength is not fifty per cent of our strength in Europe to-day'; 'The Government will see to it that in air strength and air power this country shall no longer be in a position inferior to any country within striking distance of our shores'; 'I give my word that there will be no great armaments'; 'If I had told the country "Germany is arming and we must re-arm" . . . the loss of the election, from my point of view, would have been certain'; 'Don't listen to the jitterbugs; these timid panic-mongers are doing the greatest harm'; 'I cannot find that, among Mr. Churchill's very great qualities, judgment is pre-eminent'; 'Those who doubt Herr Hitler's assurances are living in an unreal world'; 'The almost terrifying power that Britain is building up has a sobering effect on the opinion of the world'; 'I bring you peace in our time'; 'The Golden Age is coming'; 'Czechoslovakia, a country far away which we know nothing

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about'; 'I believe Herr Hitler when he says he has no further territorial ambitions in Europe'.

On that 3rd September, 1939, when the war which had long been in progress was at length admitted by our declaration of war, though the real fighting was not yet to begin for several months, I walked in imagination through that nightmare chamber of old men's heads, reproducing themselves to infinity, and shrieking imbecile phrases. The seventh age! The pageant of the years between 1918 and 1939!

Where was here truth, honour, faith or loyalty; was it conceivable that the phrases these same mouths now began to speak would have any more meaning, any more sincerity?

Shuddering, I put that nightmare from me and saw in imagination its sequel: Young men, coming from all parts of Britain, from all parts of the Empire, coming across the sea in ships, defiling down the gangways, forming up on the wharves and quays, forming up, marching away, going up to the line, going over the top, falling, falling. . . .

True, there would be no 'first fine careless rapture' this time; that trick, at least, could not be played twice, and these men would come, and go, in a spirit of grim and illusionless resolve, to do a job they should never have had to do. Many would never return. What of the others, who survived? They would come back to a world which they had saved, yes, but which would still be ruled by those same aged men, who had never known struggle or war or poverty or patriotism, or such of them as still lived, and their fellows. 'No recriminations!' 'Let the dead past bury its dead!' And the dead of the present, and those who would survive?

Of all those putrid phrases, which I have resurrected once more from a putrid past, none was more insolent or more untrue, indeed all history contains few phrases so absurd, as that once spoken by Mr. Baldwin:

When the next war comes and European civilization is wiped out, as it will be and by no force more than that force, then do not let them [the young men] lay the blame upon the old

## DEAR FRIENDS, ONCE MORE!

men. Let them remember that they principally and they alone are responsible for the terrors that have fallen on the earth.

Shades of Mephistopheles and Machiavelli! The terrors had not then fallen and the war had not come. Ample time, many years, remained to prevent them. But — 'If I had told this country, Germany is re-arming and we must re-arm . . .'

What had young men to do with this war? They were the men who saw it coming and would have prevented it, and who were howled down as 'Reds' and 'extreme anti-Nazis' by the elderly ganders, who with senile cunning were gagged and bound in their places on the back benches of Parliament, who were victimized in their employment, who were silenced in the press.

Consider this remark of an exceptionally courageous and outspoken writer upon the third appointment, to be Air Minister, of that Sir Samuel Hoare who was Mr. Baldwin's chief lieutenant on the day in 1934 when Mr. Baldwin declared, 'His Majesty's Government are determined in no conditions to accept any position of inferiority with regard to what air force may be raised in Germany in the future':

What shall I say of the new appointment of Sir Samuel Hoare? I have two censors, the official censor, who can put me in gaol, and my private censor, who can deprive me of my livelihood.

Free Press!

These men climbed the ladder of success and fame and baronetcies and peerages from the rung of one disaster to another. They are still at the top, nearly all. One or two have withdrawn, for the nonce, to distant embassies, to await a glorious political resurrection when the war has been won and a new world is to be made fit for heroes to live in. They have vacated, for the present, one or two important ministries.

But the machine, which they made and which they manipulate, is still in full control. Are such men to resume their antics when another world war has been finished, are they to let the derelict



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areas rot and the slums putrefy and unemployment stalk the streets while they idly babble and a new world war brews?

Youth against youth! For anybody's sake! This was also the theme of the speech by one of Mr. Baldwin's foremost colleagues, Lord Halifax, of which I have already spoken, a speech so gratifying to the body of moribund people in England which supported all these men during all these years that it was 're-printed in pamphlet form' and distributed in vast numbers.

How sweet and toothsome a titbit, at the end of it all — it wasn't our fault, the young men were to blame! Ah me, what are young men coming to nowadays, the world isn't what it is when I was what I was! Let's sit back now and see what sort of a mess they make of it. Life is still pleasant at Malvern and Leamington.

The things we are enduring and shall yet endure were brewed by old men of rare selfishness and blindness, men without either civic or national patriotism, for they neither cured the pestilent domestic scandals of England nor prevented the new war. The result of their work is plain to see — chaos in Europe and vast destruction in Britain.

When war was eventually declared, on September 3rd, 1939, I breathed again, having held my breath for some six months, for I knew that this was our last chance of survival, and if we missed it, we were finished.

We should enter the war on the most unfavourable conditions possible, all the favourable opportunities to avert it or finish it quickly having been missed, but if we did not fight this time our capitulation without a fight, or defeat in a quick encounter with Germany alone, would be inevitable.

The German-Russian Pact, signed a few hours before, had extinguished the last hope of saving peace. If we now let Poland fall, every other country in Europe, including France (this is proved by the subsequent capitulation, almost without a fight, of that country) would abandon hope of offering resistance to Germany and would rush to make terms with her; we should be left alone.

## DEAR FRIENDS, ONCE MORE!

But should we fulfil our promise to the Poles, so rashly given in the absence of the alliance with Russia, but still a promise or should we let her fall?

This was the point at which I left the second book of these three, *Disgrace Abounding*, finished in March, 1939, just after the invasion of Prague. Having passed through Poland on my way home, I wrote that that country was obviously next-on-the-list, and that by all the signs we should let her down — *unless the Poles fought*, which would make all the difference, because in that case, I thought, the feeling of Britain would probably force the Government to act.

Exactly this happened. All through the summer, and up to the very last moment, the doubt remained whether we should fulfil our promise to the Poles. *The Times*, which had foretold what would happen to Czechoslovakia at our behest when that still seemed an unthinkable thing to most English people, immediately after the giving of the promise to Poland began to write, in similar vein, that 'The new obligation . . . does not bind Great Britain to defend every inch of the present frontiers of Poland', that Polish 'independence' was a different thing from Polish 'integrity', and so on.

Here was the doctrine which led to Munich and the present war, the doctrine which led that noble and sleigh-born Russian family to try and appease the pursuing wolves by successively throwing each of its children to them, until there were no children left and the wolves caught and ate the parents. Here was the humbugging-with-words, the insincerity in thought, which was the bitter despair of such men as myself at that time — of young men. As long as such things continued to be said, nothing was certain.

And, indeed, when Mr. Chamberlain rose in the House of Commons on September 2nd, 1939, with the Germans already in Poland, the mortal danger of another essay in appeasement, in self-destruction, remained. For by this time the dry-rot had eaten deep into the soul of France, too, which was wobbling, and he made yet another of those appallingly cold speeches, as of the

## NEW WARS FOR OLD

man in the moon discussing events on our planet, which so chilled the blood and undermined faith and bred cynicism and weakened hope. He spoke, not of war, but of 'a conference', in which, however, 'His Majesty's Government would find it impossible to take part while Poland was being subjected to invasion.' But if only Herr Hitler would withdraw. . . .

Ah yes, if only!

But at that moment the feeling of Britain *did*, at long last, break through — for the Poles were fighting! Human emotions began to simmer beneath that lifeless crust, the emotions of a bewildered and uncomprehending and anxious people. Members who, for their part, might once again have trooped silently out of the House, murmured deferentially about 'incessant strain' and 'grave concern' and 'honour' and 'no more devices for dragging out what has been dragged out too long'.

And when the Labour spokesman, Mr. Greenwood, rose, a Tory voice, Mr. Amery's, called 'Speak for England!'

God, if only a few more men would have spoken for England during those weary and dreary years!

So, when he rose next day, Mr. Chamberlain had at length perceived that 'there were in some parts of the House doubts and some bewilderment as to whether there had been any weakening, hesitation or vacillation on the part of His Majesty's Government'.

We had long been *at* war with Germany — since 1933, at the latest. Now we *declared* war. The feeling of England, of Britain, prevailed. Standing on the scaffold with the noose round our necks, we freed ourselves from it and came down the steps again — to fight.

## CHAPTER 2

### SYMPATHY FOR THE NOBLE VISCOUNT

ALL wars begin with phrases. Elderly gentlemen proclaim that they will not sheathe the sword until . . . Monarchs, soon ignominiously to abdicate and fly their countries, monarchs who have even advised brother-monarchs to put themselves at the head of their armies and die fighting, cry, like Kaiser Wilhelm in 1914, 'We shall resist to the last breath of man and horse, and shall fight out the struggle even against a world of enemies. Woe and death to all those who resist my will! Woe and death to all those who do not believe in my mission! Woe and death to the cowards! Let the enemies of the German people perish. God demands their destruction — God, Who by my mouth commands you to execute His will!'

God, as you may discover if you examine the speeches which are made at the outbreak of wars, is indeed everywhere.

The phrase I have quoted above, *Sympathy For The Noble Viscount*, was the one which ushered in our share of the present unpleasantness. It deserves immortality.

It was used by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who by common consent is better qualified than any other to express the view of the Highest Quarters about Britain's foreign undertakings. Archbishops in other countries, claiming to speak for the same celestial authority, uttered contrary views, but then, these foreigners . . . The Noble Viscount to whom the sympathy was offered was Lord Halifax, the Foreign Minister, and the reason was that the policy of appeasement had ended in war.

Whether 'appeasement' was a correct description for the policy, or the opposite, is still a matter of violent controversy in this country, and my views were registered before it ended in war. The point is that, by this method, you never can go wrong. If you take a stance which obviously will land your ball in the

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bunker, while your aim is the green, you are assured of sympathy. 'Well played, sir. Oh, hard luck, sir.'

Much sympathy was exchanged about the time the war broke out by the members of the little Olympian coterie who were painting the good ship Appeasement battleship-grey and altering its name to H.M.S. Resolute. To inaugurate the conflict for which Mr. Baldwin had long since blamed the young men, and which Lord Halifax was presently to call the conflict of youth-against-youth, a lawyer-peer, Lord Macmillan, was made Minister of Information at the age of 66, and when a public outcry arose against the enlistment, overnight, of 999 most queerly assorted people to this Ministry, at fabulous cost to a sorely-tried country embarking on war, a letter-writer-to-*The Times* expressed his 'sympathy for Lord Macmillan'.

When, as a further concession to the blameworthy young men of the country, Sir John Gilmour, at the age of 63 and in failing health, was made Minister of Shipping in virtue of 'character and experience' (to quote, inevitably, Mr. Chamberlain) consternation everywhere prevailed, even in the House of Commons, because Sir John, though much loved in the House, had no experience of shipping, and *The Times* remarked that the appointment of a man who knew shipping had been expected, which, in *The Times*, is the equivalent of most violent attack.

But the wounds of criticism were soothed by the sympathy of another Olympian letter-writer. And when, a little later in the war, a most offensive odour of bribery and corruption, involving a convicted swindler of alien origin and one or two other like individuals, arose around the Ministry of Supply a daily Tory newspaper referred to the afflicted Minister, who at the time of Munich had proclaimed Mr. Chamberlain to be the greatest character of all time, in these terms: 'Let us say plainly, that he deserves sympathy as well as criticism.' Thus this organ of the British Press proved that nothing could prevent it from saying what it thought.

As always in times of crisis and suffering, tender sympathy flowed profusely to-and-from the members of the Mutual

## SYMPATHY FOR THE NOBLE VISCOUNT

Admiration Society which governs us. The staff of the Ministry of Information suffered no mortal incision; indeed, six months later the 999 officials had increased to nearly 1,400, still including the original museum-custodians, professors, musicians, parsons, artists, and the like, and even these were not enough, for in addition to this Ministry, which was guessed to cost some £2,000,000 a year, there was a 'Royal Institute of International Affairs' which cost the taxpayer £55,000 in 1940, £25,000 of this going to a group of University professors and dons housed in Balliol College, Oxford, whose task was to prepare 'a weekly review of the foreign press', to what end none knew, and there was also a 'British Council for Cultural Relations' costing £386,000. Sir John Gilmour, by the same token, remained Minister of Shipping, until a few weeks before his death.

The ship's company of H.M.S. *Resolute*, the British people, seemed not even to wonder about these things; it was too busy filling in its football coupons.

The British Government with which Britain entered the war was one of the strongest imaginable in point of experience, though, as in the case of Sir John Gilmour, the experience of its members was seldom relative to the affairs of which they had charge; they had just lived a long time.

Beside Mr. Neville Chamberlain stood two Ministers whose claims to experience were undeniable, for between them they had been in politics for about sixty years and between them they had held innumerable Cabinet posts — Air, India, Home Office, Justice, Exchequer, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, no subject was ever too technical for them to master.

One was Sir John Simon, whom I remembered in 1917. Withdrawing at that time from the Councils of State for a brief while rather than countenance conscription, he had become a Major in the Royal Flying Corps and visited one day in France the flying-officers' mess of which I was then a member; with truly Arctic geniality he then conversed with us.

Now, I saw his picture again, after twenty-two years, as he chatted, in his most intimidatingly jovial mood, with young flying

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officers in a Royal Air Force mess in England. How time and the R.A.F. fly!

Sir John (now Lord Simon) had a spell as British Foreign Minister at the time of one of the first aggression-wars, the condonation of which led to the present war (the Japanese attack on China), and deprecated League action against Japan, so that the then Japanese spokesman, M. Matsuoka, stated that Sir John 'has said in half an hour, in a few well-chosen phrases, what I have been trying to say in my bad English for the last ten days'. (Strangely, long after the present war had begun, when the mists were supposed really to have cleared, the blinkers really to have fallen from our eyes, when we really did know what-we-were-fighting-for and what aggression-looked-like-when-we-saw-it, *The Times* published a reference to 'Japan's great experiment in China' in its columns.)

The other Minister of great experience was Sir Samuel Hoare who, when his turn came to be Foreign Minister, advocated League action against Italy in another aggression-war, but simultaneously concerted with M. Laval of France a plan for the partitioning of the victim of aggression, Abyssinia. His are those notable phrases 'The golden age is coming' (March 1939) and 'Don't listen to the jitterbugs' (March 1939). He is now Ambassador in Spain, where Nazi and Fascist aggression triumphed, and is receiving a sound build-up, from the Press in England well-disposed towards him, as the astute diplomat who-kept-Spain-out-of-the-war, so that a triumphal return to the scenes of his former triumphs seems not unlikely.

Contemplating that British Government under which the overt war began, I wondered why the generation that fought the war of 1914-18 never could break its way through that doughy crust and come to the control of affairs in Britain. Among the rulers of 1939 were few men who had known the front line in that war, whose lives had taken them outside the Whitehall rut.

There *were* among them men who had already held office in the war-that-was-won, and many more who for years had held

## SYMPATHY FOR THE NOBLE VISCOUNT

office during the peace-that-was-lost. But nothing disturbed their serene self-confidence and there they were, at the helm of H.M.S. Resolute in the new war. Among them were National Liberals and Liberal Nationals and Irrational Liberals and National Labourists and National Illiberals and whatnot, but the most powerful microscope could not detect any shade of difference between them. Office was their profession; they were aloof from the people; and when they committed their innumerable errors of judgment — well, time heals all wounds, and give me your sympathy.

As far as I could discover, then, I was about the only man in the country who held these views. Yielding to the reproaches of my friends, who held me to be out of touch with British thought, I made those English journeys, and found they were right; there was no British thought.

The people had learned nothing; but, also, they had forgotten nothing, because they never remembered anything. They did not feel that anything was amiss with England. If a newspaper told them, one day, with complete certainty that no war was coming, and, the next, that war had been declared, it meant nothing to them. If a politician told them, one day, that he had guaranteed a country against aggression, and, next day, they learned that this country had been annexed by a predatory neighbour power, they simply said 'Oh well, the other man broke his word', and that was all. -

Yet I thought these things important because, after the new war, there was still *The Peace To Come*, and that, too, could be lost by the same methods. But that would be intolerable. We cannot eternally go on from victory in war to defeat in peace; death would not be worth dying at that rate.

When the war emerged into the open, on September 3rd, 1939, 'certain adjustments', to borrow from the exquisite language of Eton, Balliol, and Whitehall, were necessary in the views of many people about Hitler.

In *The Times*, for instance, Herr Adolf Hitler, the Führer, became Hitler-the-house-painter, and an eminent mental



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specialist who, in the justly famous Letters Column, had described this menial being in 1937 as 'the greatest psychotherapist of a nation', whatever that may mean, but it sounds good, announced that he was 'hysterical, paranoiac and megalomaniac'.

His mania, it was indicated, became clear when he made his pact with Bolshevy, and after that maniacal act 'all sane men' desired his disappearance from the scene. (A similar view prevailed, and was even indicated in a booklet by Lord Lloyd expounding 'The British Case', about Mussolini, whose Fascism, it was explained, was a far, far better thing than Hitler's National Socialism, but when Mussolini, too, went mad, and made *his* pact with the man who had made a pact with Bolshevy, he was demoted from Signor Mussolini the Duce to Mussolini the Top-Wop).

Simultaneously, it was discovered that the chief maniac, even long back in the days of his psychotherapeutic greatness, had habitually broken his promises, and a long list of these shattered undertakings was prepared and published, by *The Times*, as the First Book of Revelations. The Second Book of Revelations (at any rate they were called 'revelations' by *The Times* and 'disclosures' by Mr. Chamberlain, though the material in them had been unremittingly reported by British newspapermen in Berlin for seven years) came when the British Government issued a White Paper about the German concentration camps and the things that happened in them — had, indeed, been happening in them since 1933.

But not all the great men were taken aback or dismayed by events. Mr. G. Bernard Shaw, also speaking in the Letters Column, said that Hitler had put himself 'under the powerful thumb of Stalin, whose interest in peace is overwhelming. And everyone except myself is frightened out of his or her wits. Why? Am I mad? If not, why? Why? Why?'

A few hours later Stalin's overwhelming interest in peace was manifested by Hitler's attack on Poland, and Mr. Shaw, braced by this success, continued in other journals to make pungent deadsure comments on the march of events.

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The familiar chorus culminated, inevitably, when the war came, in the announcements of leading politicians that they would face the verdict of history without fear.

A politician may have been wrong a hundred times, but when the cumulative sum of those errors adds up to the monosyllable, WAR, he always advances fearlessly to The Bar Of History. Such intrepidity may seem superhuman. Yet he never quails before that posthumous judgment. He never knew before what the future held, but this time he does. It will be after his time, anyway, and he will not furl the sword or sheathe the umbrella until . . . (Even London's nude theatre caught this disease, and deciding to 'keep the Union Jack flying above it' after all other theatres closed, when the air raids began, proudly announced that 'there cannot be much doubt what history will say of the courage of all those engaged here'.)

I think the worst thing about war is this cackling chorus of aged voices, this venerable Greek choir in the background, while in the foreground young men tramp, tramp, tramp across the stage and disappear in the shadows.

Inevitably, when the war broke out, a letter-writer-to-*The Times* announced the discovery that the German language contained 'no word for "gentleman"', and this discovery has presumably now gone to join in immortality its aged friend — that the French language has no word for 'home'.

What *does* gentleman mean in English, anyway? A German writer once pointed out that, in England, 'gentleman' and 'of independent means' are interchangeable terms. A Tory Chief Whip once rebuked some non-Etonian new Members with the words 'It is as well that candidates who represent our Party should be gentlemen'; is then a gentleman a man who went to that school on the playing fields of which the Peace of 1918-39 was lost?

I suppose a gentleman, in the average British understanding, is a man with whom any lady could trust herself on a desert island in the certain knowledge that nothing worse than death would befall her. That is why blondes do not prefer gentlemen.

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One or two other striking phrases fell about the time the war began. For instance, a phrase was current about 'War Babies'. These were not the same war babies as those we knew in the last war, nor were they those strange freaks of procreation by means of which nature, at the outbreak of this one, seemed to be exerting herself to make good its depredations in advance. In Chile, for instance, a five-year-old girl had a baby. In England a healthy baby girl was born with another baby inside her. And in Manchester, where fiction habitually hides its head, feeling unequal to the struggle with truth, a man who 'had no more idea than had his wife that she was about to have a baby', awoke one night to find it, to his and her astonishment, between them in the bed.

But these were other 'War Babies', and their progress was, at the *beginning* of the war, followed with loving attention in the Wall Street reports published in the financial columns of a London newspaper:

'"War Babies" rise. Wall Street dealers heard Hitler's speech, decided that it did not foreshadow any peace offer at the moment — and up shot prices. The general list closed 1 to 4 dollars higher but the "War Babies" spurted anything to 8 dollars . . . Heavy bouts of profit-taking failed to stem the gaining prices and the market closed at the day's highest level. Only dull period was when dealers were too busy listening to Hitler to care about the market.'

Then, the next day:

'Wall Street is Strong. A rush of buying orders for "war" stocks from all parts of the country was the chief feature of another very active session on Wall Street, in the course of which fairly considerable profit-taking was readily absorbed . . . Much of to-day's buying was stimulated by the growing belief that there will be a long-drawn-out conflict in Europe, from which virtually all groups of American industry will benefit.'

But profit-taking, especially in bouts, is hard and exhausting work, and profit-takers, like all other men, must rest from their labours: so, a few days later:

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'Wall Street Quieter. Wall Street to-day was quieter, due partly to the Jewish holiday. The undertone was indecisive throughout.'

To make a Roman holiday!

These quotations show that the body, or thing, or community known as 'Wall Street' follows the misfortunes of Europe with a close interest that rarely permits even a holiday. However, the early course of the war disappointed Wall Street. It lacked what a generation intellectually reared in Hollywood calls 'action'. The 'War Babies' were a thought wan and frail. They bounced insufficiently. In short, 'Wall Street' felt it was being let down, and so, in December 1939, a persistently optimistic but slightly aggrieved Wall Streeter wrote:

'Given some token of good faith — such as a major offensive on the Western Front — I am confident that both the stock market and the grain markets would look for the nearest ceiling and go through it right away.'

If any Britisher who was in the last war or is in this one should lack a definition of 'a major offensive' here it is — a token of good faith.

In this country, too, 'War Babies' seemed to exist. The Government, in taking control of the four main-line railways, guaranteed them a minimum income of £40,000,000 yearly, and, this good news having spread even faster than bad news is said to spread, there was much speculation and 'profit-taking' in rail stocks on the Stock Exchange, so that a Socialist spokesman, Mr. Morrison, who later entered the Government, stated that a gift of some £100,000,000 (representing the sudden rise in the value of railway stocks) had been made to these fortunate people, who, he alleged, had been forewarned, and thereby forearmed. Rubber, being of bounceable nature, also was among the 'War Babies'; 'Rubber Profits £1,352,133 up' announced the newspapers of one company's trading results for 1939.

Other phrases, some of them familiar from the last war, became current as the war later wore on. Mr. Winston Churchill, when he had become Prime Minister, told the boys of his old school,

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Harrow, that when the war was won 'it must be one of our aims to work to establish a state of society where the advantages and privileges which hitherto have been enjoyed only by the few shall be far more widely shared by the men and youth of the nation as a whole'.

Now, the whole purpose and effect of the 'public' school system, in the state to which it has come in England, has been to restrict these advantages and privileges to a small class, inter-related by blood or marriage or common interest, and with a very small proportion of new entry purchasable only by money. It is the greatest single evil in our system, and bears more responsibility for the domestic scandals of England and for failure to prevent the present war than any other one thing.

Mr. Churchill, by all portents, will have more power and opportunity to mend this, when the war is over, than any other man ever had. May he remember those words and complete his task — which will not be completed by victory. The rank growth of privilege, nepotism, influence, protection, corruption, and money-snobbery strangle the life of England as surely as the weeds strangle those derelict farms. Every Government we have had within human memory — and the picture of England after their rule — offers the proof of this rottenness, the most insidious part of which is that the members of the coterie, never having been outside it, often enough do not realize its rottenness themselves, but think of their claim to rule, acquired not by merit but by money or prenatal election, as a God-ordained thing synonymous with patriotism and the good of England, for which it is very bad.

'Sympathy for the Noble Viscount!' That is their creed, their bible, their war-cry, their get-out and their epitaph.

## CHAPTER 3

### GREAT BORE WAR

IN the little white house I watched the first nine months of the war, the nine months which England, from her stolid respect for making-haste-slowly, still needed to give birth to a new government.

An appalling nine months, worse than all the years that went before. For now the war *was* come, and after a brief, shuddering awakening, as of a sleeping man stung on the nose by a bee, England went to sleep again.

The call-up of men to the forces seemed to progress with the speed of an elephant trying to compete in the Derby. Mr. Chamberlain went to the Guildhall and there unburdened the heart of the Tory Party by saying, in this war, wages must not start chasing after prices, for that would be vicious; he saw the war, seemingly, not only as a conflict between youth-and-youth, but also as one between prices-and-wages, and how much warm sympathy must have flown from those Tory bosoms towards him when he expounded this warm and reassuring Brummagem philosophy.

Here, they thought tenderly, is indeed the 'man who will go down to history as the greatest European statesman of this or any other time' (Mr. Victor Raikes, Con., S.E. Essex).

Everywhere I went people were crowding into the picture palaces, thronging to the greyhound races, circumwaddling round golf courses, or standing about cricket fields in the stricken postures of figures in a Grecian frieze.

Cricket! What depths of depression I plumbed, in those days, when I halted alongside some verdant field and looked across at the scoreboard, 'Score: 21, wickets 6, last man 3', and contemplated the incoming batsman slowly covering the quarter-mile to the wicket, the bowler signalling his fieldsman an inch more

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to the left or an inch more to the right, the field languidly changing over every sixth ball, the little group of batsmen, bowled out or still to bat, sitting round the green shed and applauding their slowly-returning colleague who had just been given out l.b.w., after making 7 runs. Ye Gods, I thought, a pallid spectre of a sport, a grim and ghastly ghost of a game.

With the picture of those German legions crouching behind the West Wall, of their legions of tanks and aeroplanes, in my mind, I found such scenes horribly incongruous. Yet a colonel sitting beside me in a railway train once, seeing such a picture through the window, remarked 'That's what we're fighting for.' Was it, I wondered.

This, by the way, was one of the few words ever spoken to me in an English railway train. But everybody seemed to interpret 'the things we were fighting for' according to his lights. The *Sketch*, for instance, in reproducing a picture which it called 'Conversation Piece', said 'It breathes the spirit of all that we are fighting to preserve. It was taken in the drawing-room of Weston Hall, Towcester, Northants, the country home of Mr. and Mrs. Sacheverell Sitwell, who are seated on the right. Lady Bridget Parsons is just visible on the sofa, and the Duchess of Westminster is busy with her petit-point in a chair by the fire. A fine Lely portrait of a Sitwell ancestor hangs above the mantelpiece'.

As no bombs immediately fell, next-to-nothing was done about air-raid shelters; that was left until the bombs began to arrive. After a few weeks of exultant reports in the Press about the dearth of food supplies in Germany, food rationing was introduced, but was in practice a joke, and everywhere I went the shop windows were filled to bursting with hundreds of different kinds of biscuits, sweet cakes, lollipops, chocolates, cream buns, fudge, stickjaw, and toffee.

England, in fact, settled down to boredom. Nothing of the spirit of 1914 was apparent, when nearly every young man rushed into uniform as fast as he could, when no girl was happy unless she could hang upon a khaki-covered arm. Men who now tried voluntarily to join up were rejected as fast as the

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official machine could reject them; in military quarters a strong feeling patently prevailed that a lot of outsiders were trying to muscle-in on their private war. I saw far fewer uniforms in the streets than in 1914. We made no move to succour the Poles, and when the Germans had overrun them and divided their country with the Reds, they too, settled down behind their West Wall, while behind the Maginot Line, and further north, millions of French and thousands of British soldiers languished in inaction. Neither side bombed the other and when (after the invasion of Denmark) the German Propaganda Ministry accused British airmen of dropping an odd bomb on a German town the British authorities virtuously scouted this as another German lie.

I travelled long distances and saw hardly any sign of military preparations or preparedness. I heard many people expressing puzzlement or scepticism about the war. I leaned against a sunlit farm-house wall and talked to the farmer, who said 'The Guvvermen doan *want* to fight the Germans, sir.' I had a road breakdown, and the mechanic who mended my car said, of the troops quartered thereabouts, that only the outer men in each three had rifles; there were not enough for the centre file. I talked to a country policeman, a fine upstanding fellow with the three ribbons of 1914-18 on his chest, who spoke disgustedly of some soldiers billeted upon him; he doubted, he said, whether they would ever learn to know one end of a rifle from another, but he, who could show them and show them quickly, had been rejected for service.

Presently people who talked like this were sent to prison for causing 'alarm and despondency', but, by Jupiter, there was never in our history more cause for alarm and despondency than in those days, when Mr. Chamberlain was saying that 'Hitler has blundered' and 'Hitler has missed the bus', indeed, Hitler seemed to be an inveterate catcher of blunderbuses, but actually he was preparing swift and successful attacks, while in England two million unemployed still mocked all the talk about our gigantic preparations and the increasing speed of our war production.



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England, as I say, settled down to boredom, and seemingly thought that 'not to be interested in the possibilities of defeat' would in due course bring victory. The last war but one was the Boer War, the last war was the Great War, and this one is the Great Bore War, said one writer.

Only in two departments of 'preparedness' were we ready, most efficiently and completely ready, ready for all that might come. These two were ineffective and, as I think, unnecessary. I mean, the black-out and the anti-gas measures.

As both these offer good examples of the muddled thinking which is the scourge of this country I mean to discuss them at some length. Actually, these following notes were written, partly before the war and partly in the early weeks of it, but as events have vindicated them I incorporate them here. I still cherish the hope that people in this country will begin to think one day.

The black-out is the most satanic of inventions. Neither Mafeking nor Armistice Night will be able to compare with that night when the lights go on again in England! It is a soul-killing thing. It is also ineffective. What is really needed, effectively to combat the night-raider, is a white-out. The fact that the black-out is still with us shows how monstrously difficult it is to get a thing undone once it has been done by officialdom.

Everybody who may read this book will know that the black-out offers not hindrance to night-raiders in finding a city they wish to bomb. People who live in cities which have been bombed will also know that it does not prevent them from finding and bombing definite areas in those towns, even individual buildings. Was not London City bombed on a night when the fire-spotters on the roof were absent, because it was the 'English week-end'? (This was one of the barnacles still remaining on our war-mindedness after sixteen months of war.) Was not Buckingham Palace bombed several times?

The black-out, thus, is the friend of the night-raider. It does not prevent him from finding his way. It gives him the best cover he could wish. But it *does* prevent our night-fighters from

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finding him and shooting him down. They could only do that if he were visible, and to make him visible you must either light up the sky, or light up the ground so that a British fighter, flying high, can see beneath him the night-raider against that background of light.

The policy of the black-out is, once again, that policy which we followed so long in foreign affairs — the policy of the ostrich, which is to put your head in the sand and imagine that you cannot be seen.

Enough people in this country are by now familiar with the results of bombing for this to be clear to them. I believe it is clear to all people who have made a specialized study of the problem of defeating the night-raider. Why was the day-raider defeated? Because he could be seen and shot down. Yet I dare swear we shall finish the war, as we began it, with the black-out.

More vain by far were the measures taken against gas, which to me seemed to approach dementia. At the outbreak of the war the save-us-from-gas mania was truly fantastic.

People were told to 'gasproof' their rooms and all over the country they did this; I heard an expert in the radio imploring good gas-proofers not to forget the little grating under their front doorsteps, through which some of this dread vapour might penetrate to their otherwise well-fortified parlours, and in a lonely little country house, ten miles from the nearest town, tucked away in the folds of two hills, I sat and talked to a man while a carpenter boarded up his fireplace, while through the window I could see the legs of another, who was filling up all cracks and crevices.

In a remote Somersetshire lane, one morning, I saw two tiny tots going to school, one leading the other by the hand; in their free hands they desperately clutched their gas-masks. At a tiny fishing village I saw a man put out to sea in a row-boat; an old lady sitting on the sea-wall gasped incredulously and said to her husband, 'Ooh look, he hasn't got his gas-mask!'

At the Old Bailey a man was sentenced to death for murder;

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he started to leave the dock, then turned back and picked up his gas-mask; probably later, just before the trap dropped, a warder took it from him and said: 'You won't want that.' Gas-masks for bow-wows were advertised. Somewhere, probably, gas-proof boudoirs for pekinese, gas-proof aspidistra chambers, gas-proof cages for canaries were being sold and bought.

I think this gas-mask craze is the most stupendous of all the crazes Insanity Fair has ever seen. Who said you cannot fool all the people all the time? Clearly you can. They *want* to be fooled. If you deprive them of their Red bogymen, they must have a Gas bogymen.

The only time I was ever in a gas attack I had forgotten my mask, but fortunately it proved to be smoke. But may I say that gas is not a lethal weapon, for the purposes of war? If you use it on the ground, you are dependent upon the wind and its effect then is very small, too undependable, in comparison with high explosives, to be worth using. And from the air you can hardly use it at all, for, even if your object were the senseless one of killing as many civilians as possible, and not of doing as much destruction as possible, you could not kill with gas bombs a fraction of the people you can kill with high explosives.

It is fantastic. In this country there must be hundreds of thousands of men who fought in the last war and know something about gas. And anyway, after peace broke out in 1918 we had an unbroken succession of wars all over the world. (Did not the little boy, asked if he knew what the 11th of November was, answer, oh yes, a long time ago there was a great war and since then we had had two minutes' peace every year?) There had been, before 1939, wars in South America, in China, in Abyssinia, in Spain, and after it began there was war in Poland. So even the most obdurately ignorant should know something about gas by now.

In the Great War, gas was relatively little used on the ground, and from the air, not at all. In all the other wars after it gas was hardly ever used, and from the air not at all, unless Mussolini's airmen in Abyssinia wasted an odd gas bomb or two just for the

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fun of the thing (bombing the tribesmen was great fun, said Vittorio Mussolini).

I should hazard the estimate that, if the average citizen's chances of being injured by a high-explosive bomb are, say, 100 to 1 against, the odds against his being damaged by a gas bomb are about 10,000,000,000 to 1 against. But if he were, by some incalculable chance, injured by a gas bomb, assuming that one should ever be dropped, the gas contained in it would probably be one against which masks would be useless. This goes for London or any city; the chances against any inhabitant of the country outside the cities being gassed would need even more noughts.

Perhaps I can make this thing clear to the one man somewhere in England who is able to understand anything that is told him by saying this: each and every citizen of this country might with as much reason build himself an ark against the danger of a new flood as gas-proof his rooms and the like. He may be killed in an air-raid — but not by gas.

These are wasted words, for long after I am gone dear old ladies of both sexes — they are born every minute — will continue in far flung country hamlets to shiver in their beds at the very mention of the words 'Red', 'Poison Gas', 'Dum-Dum Bullet' or 'Plague Germ', though such words as 'Shells', 'High Explosive', 'Bomb', and 'Machine-Gun Fire' seemingly leave them undaunted. But this is probably just, for the world owes us all a living, and without these gentle people the men who live by selling gold-bricks would starve, and the peerage might decline for want of new blood.

However, when I saw those gas-masks being distributed and those boudoirs being gas-proofed, about the time this war began, I felt sad at heart, because I felt that this was wasted energy, and that the things which urgently needed to be done, and were not being done, were to provide shelters against high-explosive bombs and to arm men of goodwill against an invasion.

Indeed, I had seen that long before the war began, and in the

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second book of these three, *Disgrace Abounding* urgently appealed for the underground stations of London, ideal natural bomb-proof shelters, to be prepared for the reception of large numbers of people. That eventually happened — after the bombs began to fall and homeless or fearful people practically stormed those subterranean refuges. Their plight at first was terrible; in the course of months it was improved and they came to be well looked after. But how much time and energy and money were wasted, how much unnecessary suffering was caused. I saw a deal of those caverns in the town, later, when the bombs were falling.

But in the first months of the Great Bore War, when nothing was being done, I watched despondently a country sunken in apathy, misinformed about the war by newspapers which told them that the Germans were starving and on the verge of defeat — without a blow having been struck against them! I could not see myself how the war was going to develop, now. I thought that Hitler, by failing to make his Pact with Russia a full military alliance for a joint blow at England, or enlisting Italy to that same end, and striking at us forthwith with all his strength, had lost his chance of successfully invading and subjugating us. But I could not see how we, in our turn, with the dilatory and dawdling and half-asleep methods we were then using, could ever achieve victory.

The same men who had cast away the peace were still in charge. The country, which nothing seemingly could move, was quite happy to have them there. What sort of an England was this? I asked myself. It was worse even than I had feared, when I was abroad, when I returned home. At that time I had at least believed that actual *war* would wake it up, when war came. But this country seemed to think that it only needed to carry a gas-mask, be 'not interested in the possibilities of defeat', leave everything to Mr. Chamberlain, and go to the pictures, and all would be well.

'The Great Bore War' they called it. Well, well, I thought, how little they know what they have coming to them. I, at any rate,

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was not bored; I was simply eaten up with desperate anxiety for the country. Those were the worst nine months I ever knew, and the years before were bad enough. But the four months which followed were worse still.

‘Bore War!’ *Donnerwetter!*

## CHAPTER 4

### DULLMOUTH

If you step into a certain train at Paddington it will bear you, resolutely, and at a fair speed and as if it knew where it wanted to go, to Exeter. At Exeter it halts for a long time, like a traveller wondering which fork to take at a crossroads.

When it ultimately starts again it behaves in a curious manner. It no longer knows where it wants to go, it casts about, here and there, like a dog seeking a trail, makes little expeditions here and little expeditions there, with frequent pauses at likely spots, and then fresh scamperings in new directions. The train, in fact, runs down from Exeter to the sea, quickly retreats from it again, like a coy and gasping maiden who has tested the water with one toe and found it too cold, and rushes, shuddering, inland to Newton Abbot.

There comes an even longer pause, while it pants for breath and gathers fresh courage, and then, gingerly, step by step, with many halts, it approaches the sea again, ultimately reaching it at Torquay. Then, tired by all this exertion and excitement, it limps painfully along the coast, with many more halts, until it comes to a river, the Dart.

It cannot go any farther, because there is no more a bridge over this river than there was over the Exe, so that if it wanted to go on it would have to run inland again, as it did to Newton Abbot, and go round, and by now the shades of night have long since fallen, and the train is dead tired, so that at Kingswear, which is the station on the Dart, it just lies down and goes to sleep.

It has had enough. It is a quite exhausted dog, now, but before it settles down it gives a final little shake, thus ridding itself of one or two fleas, namely, the few passengers who have still survived the journey that began, *ehou fugaces*, so long ago at Paddington.

They, poor souls, are much to be pitied. They have endured

## DULLMOUTH

much, and still have not reached the haven where they fain would be — Dullmouth, which lies across the Dart. They cannot even see it, for this is wartime, and Dullmouth, which not even in peacetime is dazzling in its illuminations, is blacked-out. They grope their way down to the landing-stage and wait, these Rip Van Winkles who felt themselves so young and strong and full of hope at Paddington, but whose hearts, from the long deferment of that hope of reaching Dullmouth, have been made sick, whose years now sit heavy upon their shoulders.

Across the lazily lapping water they can see a very faint flicker of light and presently they hear throbbing sounds in the darkness and out of it a monstrous shape looms up and the *Seagull*, the old ferryboat, bangs her sides against the timbers of the landing stage. Like shipwrecked mariners, saved at the uttermost moment, they stagger aboard. A minute later, men prematurely aged, they are put ashore in Dullmouth.

Men brag and boast of journeys to Thibet, of pilgrimages to Mecca, of voyages round the Cape, of perilous quests through deadly tropical jungle. Let them make this journey, if they wish to prove their spirit, their stamina and their mettle. And until they have made it, let them hold their peace.

I have made it many times. I have made it in compartments completely blacked out for an hour at a time, in the company of other passengers who spoke no word even when it was light. A strange sensation, to be borne along in a black dungeon on wheels, in the company of other human beings who never opened their lips. O purgatory of the soul, O prison of the spirit! Men talk of the Black Hole of Calcutta, of the self-imposed silence of the Trappist Monks, as if these were rare things, curiosities of history. Let them make this journey, in wartime, or for that matter even in peace.

Because the little white house, which shone for me like a light in all the darkness of that time, lay upon a hill-top a mile or more beyond Dullmouth, and because I still needed frequently to visit London, I made that exhausting expedition very often, and at the beginning hoped through it to learn afresh my native country.



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I was a man who had travelled great distances in Europe and knew that these journeys were the best means of learning to know peoples and countries. Because I had a modest gift for feeling myself quickly into the minds of men in other countries, I especially disliked to feel myself so alien and unanchored in my own country, yet I could see no resemblance in it to the England that I loved, of Chaucer, Milton and Shakespeare, of Drake, Nelson and Frobisher.

I had remained English; England had become alien. And the thing that grieved me most about England, for it seemed to be all part and parcel of the same development, was the decay of manners, and especially the fantastic silences of the English — not the British, because people from other parts of the British Isles and from the Empire are not like this, but I was in England.

Travelling between Paddington and Dullmouth, and for that matter travelling all over England, I never awakened from my amazement at these silences. They are grotesque and sub-human. What state has human society reached when men and women look shiftily at each other from the corners of their eyes and wince almost from physical pain if they are required to answer any question, make any remark? This English characteristic passes my comprehension; I never saw anything like it anywhere else I went, I do not believe it existed in England before the calamitous discovery of coal, prosperity and the public schools, and I cannot account for it.

To me it was repugnant to sit with three strangers at a table in a dining-car and to miss the bow and 'Good morning' at the beginning of the meal and the bow and 'Good day' at the end of it which are customary in the barbaric lands abroad. To me, manners, which seem daily more important than men, reach their lowest point when four human beings share a table, never exchange a word, and desperately avoid each other's eyes.

Once I shared a carriage with a man travelling to Liverpool, a man in the uniform of a naval officer, who, halfway, suddenly said to me: 'Gosh, I could do with a glass of beer.' This seemed a good opening, and a new one — otherwise the invariable

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remark, if one was ever made, was 'Not so warm to-day, is it?' — but my attempt to breed from it a little intelligent conversation was sternly repressed, and silence fell.

Another time I travelled with a man and his wife from London to Exeter. He was an army officer. They exchanged two sentences. Once she said to him: 'I expect we shall be wanting sweet peas in the garden this year, shan't we?' to which he answered, 'I expect *you* will'; and when they approached Exeter, and she had a book to pack, she said to him, 'Will you be opening the suitcase?', and his reply was 'That was not my intention; what do you want to put in it?'

Another time, I shared a compartment with a man and his wife going to Manchester. It was a dreary winter's day, grey and raining, and neither of them spoke a word between London and the outskirts of Manchester. That city, as we drew into it, offered a truly appalling picture of man's efforts to deface this planet; it was about half-past two in the afternoon, and night was falling fast; the aspect of the slimy and glistening streets was a study in degrees of drabness; the air-bombardment of England, about this time, had reached its greatest intensity; and as our train pulled in, the woman opened her mouth.

'We only want sirens now,' she said, hopelessly, listlessly, to her husband. 'That would joost about put lid on't.'

'Ay,' said he.

And silence fell again, as relentlessly as the dusk and the rain and the mist outside.

My Trappist uncle!

The one thing needed to make these scenes more absurd was supplied by the authorities, or the railway companies, when they affixed over the heads of these dumbstricken and suspicion-laden travellers a notice: 'Warning: in the last war thousands of lives were lost because valuable information reached the enemy through careless talk.'

Well, well. England must have changed a lot since the last war. I was baffled by these incomprehensible silences. They could not happen in any other country I know and seem to spring from

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some strange form of repression. The extraordinary thing was that later, when I went to France, an Englishman in the dining-car talked so loudly and incessantly that all the French people in the car looked curiously round at him!

I had ample opportunity to study and reflect about these things, on my journeys from and to the little white house. It was that rare thing in the England of this time, a corner of an English field that was for ever English. It was filled with English flowers and English books and English prints, or with the things that an Englishman had collected in foreign countries and brought back with him. It was indeed the epitome of an Englishman's life and struggle, within four walls.

It was very remote and lonely, on its hill-top, with the Channel and the Atlantic in the distance, and sometimes the wind that crashed in from the sea nearly tore its roof off. For company there was but the farmer next door, in whose sturdy neighbourliness and tales of the decline of the countryside I found at once solace and confirmation of my fears, and old Sam, who had left an arm in Flanders but still, with an iron hook strapped on to the stump, could do as good a day's work as the next man and better than most, and shared his time between the farmer and me.

These were Englishmen and I thought continually, as I was later to think in London and the other bombarded cities, 'What could England be, if the country were differently governed, if class were not eternally set against class, if the merit, and not the money, of men decided the place they should have in the affairs of the country and the contribution they should make towards its progress.'

I had deliberately chosen this part of England for my abode during the ordeal which I foresaw because I wanted to feel, when it came, that my roots were in England, and this, the West Country, the land of Drake and Hawkins, the land from which my own people had originally come, seemed to me likely to be the most English part of England.

I thought, when I came back from abroad to seek myself, for the first time, a home in England that I should be most likely to

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find England there, if England were to be found anywhere. The West Country had supplied 'hearts of oak' that were English ships and Englishmen in bygone days. From it Drake had gone out to smash the last-invasion-but-one. To it Napoleon had been brought after the last invasion had dissolved in smoke. Now we awaited another invasion. The West Country, I thought, was the place for me.

So I came to Dullmouth and, a mile beyond Dullmouth, to the little white house on the hill, and from there I explored all the West Country. It was no reassuring journey. There, as in other parts of the country, I found, on the one hand, a lovely but declining countryside and agriculture, and on the other, the unplanned, uncontrolled and untended growth of towns, townships and colonies. Derelict farms; villadom, bungalowdom; and the stately home.

I went to Brixham, where once was a thriving fishing industry. The picturesque harbour was still picturesque, but the lovely Brixham trawlers, for some reason no man could ever quite explain to me, had nearly died out. The town still tried hard to cling to its tradition and character, but this was disappearing in the atmosphere that tea-seeking trippers bring wherever they go. From curiosity I tried to buy some fish at a fish-shop; the shopkeeper had but a few pairs of kippers which had come to him from Aberdeen, or somewhere in Scotland! Somebody had put a shopping basket on the head of the statue of William of Orange on the quayside, and nobody bothered, while I was there, to take it off. A few artists had come to seek solace and subjects in the picturesqueness of Brixham — but life was fast vanishing from it.

Wherever I went, in the West Country and in England farther afield, to Exeter and Chester, to Shrewsbury and Shaftesbury, to Plymouth and Portsmouth, to Dover and Coventry, to Canterbury and Leicester, I had this feeling that everything was past participle.

The old buildings that still survived were good, in design and material; the new ones were meretricious and ugly. The old

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crafts and industries were dying out. The countryside was becoming appallingly urban.

Where, I asked myself in baffled perplexity as I contemplated the old houses at Exeter and Chester and Shaftesbury and compared them with the gilt-and-nickel fronts of the cheap-and-nasty stores which had sprung up alongside them, where was progress? Were we moving forward or going back?

The same question repeatedly sprang into my mind — when I compared Brixham harbour with the bungalow-towns that were springing up along the lovely red Devon coast nearby, when I compared Plymouth Hoe with Plymouth Town, when I looked down from Shakespeare Cliff to Dover Town.

The architecture of the between-war period, from 1918 to 1939, was as representative of that senile age as everything else it had produced, in drama, literature, films, radio, everything. The opportunity had offered to make England beautiful again, to make it fit, indeed, for the men coming back from the war, to plan and direct the growth of the cities. What happened? A joiner and a bricklayer got together, raised enough money to build a pair of semi-detached houses, sold those at sufficient profit to build four more — and in a trice they were splashing 'estates' at random over the land, slums-of-the-future which we shall never be rid of again. 'Freedom!'

It is, I think, the strangest of all comments on that age of miscalled 'freedom', that while there was this unrestricted licence to deface and vulgarize England, there was no freedom to improve it, that any individual who set himself to do this, in his own small sphere, was indeed penalized.

The greatest contrast I noticed between the state of things in England and that, for instance, in Germany or Switzerland or Holland or Czechoslovakia, was the degree of dilapidation and disrepair into which much property had fallen. I never could understand this, because it seemed to me natural that a man should wish always to improve and adorn the house he lived in. This tumbledownness of many English towns, hidden in normal times by lath and plaster, immediately, became

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apparent when bombardment began, for houses which were not struck began to crumble to pieces.

I noticed this particularly once in Dover, which had suffered a certain amount of shellfire. Walking along one street from which the harbour-harpies had gone, because it was in those days visited more by shells than by shellbacks, I said to a friend, 'What a picture of . . .' and then paused to find the phrase I wanted. 'Of English dilapidation,' he said, and I needed to say no more.

I afterwards found an explanation, as I thought, or at any rate one explanation, for this state of affairs. I believe it is customary, in England, for a man who improves his house to be inflicted with higher 'rates' — that is, to have to pay a higher annual sum for the public services, such as light and water and the removal of refuse, of which he has the benefit (incidentally, I had the benefit of none of these, in the little white house, save the weekly removal of rubbish, yet had to pay a large sum).

But surely this is stupid to the verge of lunacy? A house is not only a place to live in; it has an exterior, and an ugly or ill-kept or unkempt or semi-uninhabitable house is a blot on the landscape, which is the property of all. A clean and beautiful house, or a street of such, is a contribution to the common enjoyment. But if you encourage property-owners to let their property dilapidate and deteriorate, so that the 'rating-value' should be kept down, you are deliberately promoting ugliness and selfishness.

Another thing I noticed in England is that, although the remotest farm and cottage could count on receiving its mass produced cakes and sweets from London, conditions of sanitation and lighting often remained what they were centuries ago. I believe I also discovered one of the reasons for this appalling state of affairs — which could not be found in the other countries I have mentioned.

For instance, electric light might have been installed in the little white house, which was some miles from the nearest house that had it. I inquired about the possibility, and found that

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the local electricity company was ready to do it for a large sum, something like £150.

That is, the house was a remote one, and the idea of supplying it with electric light was considered solely, exclusively and entirely from the profit angle; if I would pay enough, I could have it. But in the other countries I have mentioned, where the electricity companies are state-controlled or municipal-controlled, or where at all events the public interest has the last word to say, the first aim is invariably to get current to the remotest and loneliest places. The cost of installation falls on the community, on all alike, not on the individual user more and more heavily in proportion to the distance he lives from the power station! Where is progress or civic feeling in such a system? Where 'freedom'?

These are some of the reasons I detected for the living conditions of England.

The penalization of small property-owners who may make improvements in their property was, as I thought, the most vicious of all the causes which contribute to a bad state of affairs.

I remembered a time in Berlin, just before the coming of Hitler, when there was an acute dearth of small dwellings. Much of Berlin had been built in the Wilhelmine days of easily-acquired prosperity and consisted of very large flats with very large rooms. By 1932 few people could afford to rent or maintain such dwellings; everybody wanted the 'one-and-a-half' or 'two-room' flat. The detestably reactionary Government of von Papen, who was to bring Hitler to power and plunge all Europe in misery and bloodshed, did one excellent thing. It relieved all owners of such apartment houses of rates, up to a fixed amount, who divided their big dwellings into two or more small ones. The result was that small, well-equipped dwellings immediately became available for the people who wanted them at rents they could afford to pay.

My English journeyings always brought me back, at last, to the little white house and to Dullmouth.

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Dullmouth was, to me, England in miniature — England with all its beauty overlain by ugliness, with all its energy overlain by apathy, with all its throbbing history and tradition overlain by the film-radio-and-thriller mentality of the villa-and-bungalow age, of the escape-from-unpleasant-reality generation.

Neither Switzerland nor Italy could have supplied a lovelier site, a lovelier natural background. Both Switzerland and Italy would have built a lovely town on this site and against this background. Here a little river, curving between wooded hills, came with suddenly widening mouth, like a cornucopia, to the sea. The town, but a long stonethrow from that sea, was none the less almost hidden from it, where it nestled behind the last of the wooded hills, on the right bank. Only from the little harbour could you get a narrow glimpse of the open water through the gateway that the hills made.

Here white houses should have clustered against the green hills. But here red brick and grey and yellow stucco did their best to make the prospect vile. From here Drake had fared forth to seek the enemy; here Drake's seamen had caroused in celebration of their victory over the Armada. But here came no ships other than those that carried the tea-and-cake-trippers to see the beauties of the Dart, and the descendants of those Elizabethan seamen, from want of another occupation, were become long-shoremen, busy with lobster pots and petrol-driven trip-round-the-bay launches. Here King Charles had once held his court, and the lovely oaken room where that had happened was still intact, with the Stuart arms carved upon its walls; you might take 'tea' in that room.

There was no *life* in this. The little square by the harbour was nearly always deserted. In the streets you seldom saw other figures than those of the lady-going-to-get-a-book-from-Boots or the retired-gentleman-taking-the-dog-for-a-walk. It was like a frame without a picture, like a stuffed bulldog.

There was no feeling of community in the town; the people lived in little, segregated, palisaded groups — the big-wigs, the middle-wigs, the lesser or ear-wigs. A stale odour of dead-and-



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gone 'regattas' hung over this once animate and vigorous little settlement, where real ships had once lain at anchor and real seamen once rolled the streets. A faint aroma of late Victorian royalties still clung to the tumbledown Royal This-or-that Hotels; you imagined long-forgotten Prince Berties and Prince Alfreds, of Teutonic mien, smoking cigars on those deserted verandas.

The charming and decorous and efficient maid in the Royal Regatta Hotel, in whose tidy hair a tiny piece of lace seemed to have alighted permanently, like a butterfly loth to journey farther, remembered them all. She had come there just about the time I was born, and had been there ever since.

One world war had left Dullmouth sleepier than ever. What would another do? Hundreds of years before it had been a gateway to the world, that magnificent, hill-framed portal to the seas and oceans that you saw, a few hundred yards away, from the little harbour, had really been a call and an opening. What was it now?

In Elizabeth's days Dullmouth had been the threshold of great adventure. What was it now? So much of England looked like that to me.

When the war, later, brought foreign seamen to Dullmouth, the girls seemed very ready to bear them company. They seemed quite happy as they strolled the deep lanes at the side of these men from overseas.

I thought that significant. Dullmouth was very much tucked away, in fact and spiritually. There was no hope of a career or advancement here, no way of broadening the mind, no intellectual life, no theatre and no music, only the alien-inspired radio and films, no community life, no gateway to adventure — save that of emigration, and the British Government, in agreement with the British Dominions, had made that as difficult as possible. Here, in the deepest heart of seafaring and rural England, was neither a thriving countryside nor a thriving seafront, only villadom in excelsis. True, there was a certain prosperity derived from 'visitors' and 'teas'.

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I was to find later, as the war advanced, that the heart of England beat as sturdily as ever there. I was to find it, chiefly, in the breasts of tradespeople, workpeople and farmers. Neighbourliness and kindness, the greatest civic virtues, I found, were still here. Here, at long last, I found the Englishmen. But that was later.

One day, about the time the war began, the *Victoria and Albert*, that blue-and-golden relic of the 'nineties, came to Dullmouth, and anchored in the lovely river. I did not see it; I was hard at work trying to make things grow where weeds had reigned. I had burned masses of weeds and thus, by proxy, destroyed the things I detested in this slumbrous and class-ridden England and now, again by proxy, I was planting new ideas and better things. I wore very old trousers, a shirt, and sweat poured from me. An elderly lady with an umbrella came toiling up the lane, looked over the hedge at me, and called imperiously: 'Which is the way to the Castle?'

'The Castle?' I said bemusedly, for the remote white house was too far from any such building for me to guess what she meant. 'What castle?'

'Dullmouth Castle, of course,' she answered, sharply, 'where the *Victoria and Albert* is lying.'

'Dullmouth Castle,' I said. 'Why, you have come far away from it. You must turn about and go back the way you came, about two miles.'

'My good man,' she said, with much irritation, 'are you trying to tell me that I must go all the way back? It is absurd. I should have seen the *Victoria and Albert* as I came if it had been down there.'

'My good woman,' I said, 'if you hope to find the sea upon a hill-top you may remain here or go farther, for all I care, but the water is at the bottom of this hill, and the ship you seek lies in it.'

For two pins, or even for one, I think, she would have transfixed me with her umbrella, she was so angry, and she seemed quite sure that I was to blame. But then she turned about, puffing and panting, and, clinging resolutely to her umbrella — it was a cloudless and unusually hot day — she began to toil down the hill again.

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I looked after her as she went, genteel, brainless, ill-mannered, self-important, arrogant, useless, and ugly, with her ridiculous hat perched atop of her wispy hair, such a woman as you could find in unnumbered thousands in that England. The war? That meant nothing to her. But the *Victoria and Albert* — ah!

Ah me, the *Victoria and Albert*! Tea and toast. Books from Boots. The dear vicar says . . . Did you see Lady Loathsome's picture in the *Queen*, my dear? The new manager served me at the Home and Bolonial, dear, such a *nice* man! The waitresses at Teacake's are *so* inattentive! Mrs. Nextdoor's new maid has given notice! Trips to town and tea at Harrod's. Dear Mr. Chamberlain. The Coronation.

Keep your brave old world, I thought, looking after her. It fits you. And I turned to burn some more weeds.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMAGINARY LINE

As the first nine months of the war dragged on the country seemed to sink deeper and deeper in apathy. I went to London, once, and saw a musical performance, of the kind they call 'revue', Satan knows why, and the main theme of this was 'Let's forget about the war'.

Somebody had thought, with this innovation, to hit on a good money-making idea, to read the public mind, to give the public what it wanted. The player who, with brave gesture and patriotic mien, stepped forward to sing the then inevitable 'There'll always be an England', was hauled back, with a loud 'NO', by the other players, who then began to boo-hoo and goo-goo about being blue and me and you and remember September and always together in all kinds of weather and being in love with the moon up above and so on and so on.

The general feeling, indeed, seemed then to be that the Bore War, like the Boer War, was a long way off, and if only you forgot about it enough it would win itself.

I was exasperated almost to the point of apoplexy by this, for I felt that by this incredible slothfulness we were casting away the trick that Hitler had put into our hands when he began the war without a great ally and without an immediate assault on England. By starting the war in that way he had, as I thought and wrote at its beginning, forfeited his only chance of victory; I still could not see how we should completely win, but I saw that we could not *lose* outright.

Now, to my creeping horror, I saw that we were giving him back the ace of trumps he had surrendered to us. We were *not* doing all we could to make it impossible for him yet to find the powerful ally, Russia or Italy, and to wean both those States from him, even if we could not win them for ourselves. Our

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call-up of men and our war-production were meandering along, rather than marching or galloping.

Yet even I, who counted as a man who saw things in a glass darkly, did not know the worst. I was well-informed about the European line-up, as my books have shown, yet by some strange chance I did not know that the Maginot Line, behind which the French army and our own was now massing in France, was a stupendous swindle, that this professedly invulnerable fortification was no fortification at all—since it did not stretch right along the French frontier, from the Alps to the sea, but broke off at the Franco-Belgian frontier, thus leaving a large gap or gateway for the Germans to march through when they again had overrun Belgium.

The Maginot Line, about which millions of words, hundreds of newspaper articles, and several books had been written, was an imaginary line. Where is the answer, what *can* the answer be, to the question, 'Why were the peoples so hoodwinked in the between-war years of 1918-39?'

For the plight of the British people was bad enough, who were for years misled about the aims of Hitlerism (which was re-arming Germany with British-lent money!) but who were nevertheless told that we were making ourselves strong enough to face any danger that might come from it, and who then, after £2,000,000,000 had been voted to that end in eight years, found themselves still hopelessly unready to meet that danger!

But consider the even more fantastic plight of the French people, from whom so many millions had been extorted in those years to build 'a wall' behind which they believed themselves secure — when it was no wall at all!

The principle of the non-accountability of Ministers seemingly prevails in France, even in the defeated France of Marshal Pétain, as in England, and the trials of the men responsible for that state of affairs have not yet been held, so that the explanation of Leon Blum and the others, like that of certain English Ministers to not dissimilar questions, seems likely to be among those things which the historian of the future will never know.

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Anyway, for my part I only learned, to my amazement, of this gap in the Maginot Line after the present war had been in progress for some months. I learned at the same time that it was not being filled and if anything lacked to increase my irritation at the apathy of England, this was it.<sup>1</sup>

In that state of mind I went to France and to Paris a few months before the French capitulation, to see Otto Strasser, whom I thought likely to play a part in German politics if and when Hitler had been eliminated.

From the moment I landed in France to the moment I left I felt something in the air which I did not understand and did not like. I could not then know that the gap which made the Maginot Line an imaginary line would not be filled. I had heard that it was not being adequately filled, but thought this to be the result of some oversight or misunderstanding or dilatoriness of the kind which would be inconceivable in a sane world but which was so normal in everything that Britain and France did in the between-war years that one came to expect it.

Thus, though I wondered uneasily about the indefinable something that I felt in the French air, I could not imagine the extent of the disaster which followed a few weeks later, that France would put up a less stout resistance than Poland. I don't know, now, why I should have expected the French to be more staunch and more alert and more prepared than we were. If I had known the full extent of the hoax which was played upon the French people in this matter of the imaginary line I should have known what was coming.

One thing gave me great qualms about it. I met an acquaintance, a British staff officer, who had been over the Maginot Line.

<sup>1</sup> All the evidence at present available suggests that the eventual capitulation of France was a thing long foreseen and prepared by some of the French leaders. They felt that the British preparations were too slow to be of much help to them and even doubted the earnestness of the British opposition to Hitler, and in that belief felt it was not worth while to have half France laid waste and two million or so of Frenchmen killed again. They thought a better strategy would be to put up the semblance of a fight, to capitulate on as good terms as they could, while holding the French fleet and the armies in the French Colonial Empire in reserve, either as a weapon to deter Hitler from occupying the whole of France or as a possible instrument for the re-entry of France into the war on our side if its course should recommend that.

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(In those days conducted parties of all sorts of people were taken over it, and even far into no-man's-land.) He had noticed that the men's quarters contained no radio, and asked the French officer who showed him round why this was. The Frenchman at first evaded the question, but then explained that the French authorities did not want the soldiers 'to listen to Stuttgart'. Stuttgart was the station from which the French colleague of Lord Haw-Haw broadcast each night to Frenchmen.

What a picture! An impregnable fortification, built at a cost of who knows how many millions or milliards, with every defensive device that the wit of man could invent — concrete, artillery, machine-guns, tank-traps, and barbed wire. Inside it, deep in the earth, lay millions of French soldiers; behind it, taught to believe that they were secure, lay the French nation.

But the commanders of those soldiers and the rulers of that nation feared that little whispering voice, that penetrated all the fortifications! And the line was not a line at all, it suddenly stopped, leaving one end in the air, so that the enemy might walk round it. Has history a greater hoax to show than this?

Over a million Frenchmen, now prisoners in German camps are paying the price of the joke.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESIGNATION AT MARBLE ARCH

STEPPING on the accelerator so that I might reach town before dark and the black-out, I came swiftly down the Great West Road, through Hammersmith and Bayswater, to Marble Arch, where the traffic lights were just beginning to show vividly against the twilight sky. It was May 10th, 1940, and as the red light halted me for a moment I switched on the radio in my car. I heard Mr. Chamberlain's voice. For once there was feeling and emotion in it. I listened, as I released the brake and moved on along Oxford Street. . . .

The months that lay behind were appalling. Listlessness lay over the country like a fog. I had wondered, as I planted seeds, what the world would be like when they came up, whether it was worth while to plant them. How many people must have thought the same, in that spring of 1940.

In the winter had come the Russian attack on Finland. For months we had exulted as the waspish Finnish soldiers, few but valiant, made ski-rings round the invaders, as a brutal invasion received well-merited punishment. But the Finns were very few, and the Russians very many. There could be no doubt about the end of it all — unless the French and British could send them help in time.

Here was a chance for us unofficially to intervene — Hitler and Mussolini had shown us, in Spain, how to do that. We needed only to give the Finns enough help to enable them to ward the Russians off, and by all the signs they would not need much help to do that. True, it would have been madness openly to intervene there in force, to expose large British forces, with frail lines of supply from the homeland, to a German attack from the south. The first aim of our diplomacy still should have been to thwart



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Hitler from gaining either Italy or Russia as full allies, and I shuddered when a War Minister but recently retired, Mr. Hore-Belisha, urged in a newspaper that we should fall upon Russia, so far away and wellnigh impossible to get at. Had we not enough on our hands already? Germany was no mean foe.

But, inevitably, our help, when it *was* ready, was too late. The Finns made their peace with Russia, at the cost of a large slice of their country — and Communism, from which our leaders had so devoutly hoped to be saved by Hitler when it did not menace them, now spread into a further area of Europe.

That was bad, but worse was to come. On April 9th the Germans pocketed Denmark — they had always boasted that they would annex this tiny country 'by telephone' when the moment came and they made good this picturesque promise. On the same day they also attacked Norway.

The German conquest of Norway was one of the most astonishing exploits in the history of war. Never was such excellent use made of fear, bluff, bribery, intimidation, and the complicity of a very few people within the victim's gates. And this is the vital importance of the Norwegian episode to us to-day, when many people tend to wring their hands and ask plaintively, 'How on earth are we ever to *win* this war, how can we ever get back into Europe and drive the Germans out?'

Hitler's friends in Norway amounted to five per cent of the population at the most. The other ninety-five per cent are our friends. If that does not convey a lesson, what can? The same holds good for all the countries under German occupation.

The capital of Norway was captured by 1500 men, so efficiently had the exploit been prepared. Not a bomb was dropped on the capital, not a shot fired at or in it. The Germans' bought-man in Norway, Major Quisling (he gave many people in England a welcome opportunity to find a Norwegian name for treachery, though enough English ones might have suggested themselves) had once been War Minister, seven years before, and at that time had appointed his friends to certain important posts. German merchant ships, their holds full of German soldiers, were enabled,

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with the assistance of Major Quisling, to anchor unexamined in at least one Norwegian port until the moment came for these men to disembark, at dead of night, and seize the port. (Major Quisling, incidentally, had never succeeded in getting a single representative of his party returned to Parliament and his newspaper had a circulation of less than 3000 in all Norway. But he had a few friends among army and navy officers and Hitler kept him supplied with unlimited funds.)

An artillery officer at Oscarsborg, however, ordered his guns to fire when the German flagship, the cruiser *Blücher*, was 800 yards from the shore: it was sunk with a German admiral, a German general, their staffs and 1500 men. The little Norwegian mine-layer *Olav Trygvason* sank the German cruiser *Emden* and a German submarine. These two incidents show what damage Norway could have done the Germans, if Norway and Britain had been more watchful. Incidentally, the current belief that the German success in Norway was primarily due to treachery in Norway, is wrong. The traitors were very few and the Norwegians fought brilliantly. The German triumph was primarily due to Norwegian trustfulness and British unwariness.

A German colonel told Mr. Edmund Stevens, of the *Christian Science Monitor*, 'What we feared most of all was a lightning reciprocal blow by the British. If they had struck on Tuesday or even Wednesday, our whole expedition would have been a disaster. Fortunately, one can always depend on the British to arrive too late'.

So much for the brilliantly organized and executed German attack on Norway, which I have briefly summarized here because of its great importance to us in the present and later stages of the war.

There is one thing to be said about it. So vast an undertaking, so well organized, and so superlatively well carried out, must have been known for weeks and months in advance, to a number of people in Norway.

From my experience as a newspaperman abroad I can say with the utmost certainty that it is incredible that no British corre-

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spondent of long-standing should have gained no inkling of it — but seemingly there were no such resident British newspapermen, exclusively devoted to their calling, in that country; if any were there, there were only 'special correspondents' who had had no time to get below the surface.

If the British Legation in Oslo and the representatives of the British Secret Service in Norway obtained no hint of what was afoot — that is a thing only explicable to me in the light of the general condition of incompetency, listlessness and apathy which prevailed, at that time, in England itself.

Nevertheless, that which happened in Norway may, in the end, have been the salvation of Britain and the Empire, because it *did* administer, at long, long last, a shock to the complacency of the country, and this shock worked upward until it finally reached even those at the top who had so long proved their capacity to be shock-proof.

In England Mr. Chamberlain still ruled. The controversy, for or against him, still might have seemed, to a despairing stranger, to be the thing that preoccupied most people's minds, more than the war itself. He had but few months still to live. Of him, the Minister of Health, Mr. Walter Eliot, had said a little while before, that he was 'the inspiration of the Government'; that he was 'a remarkably healthy figure' who seemed to gather strength as the days went on and afforded an example of the sort of human beings constructed long ago, before many of our health services had come into being, that 'if we produce a generation which, at the age of seventy, is proportionately more powerful than Mr. Chamberlain, as the health services of to-day are proportionately more powerful than the health services of seventy years ago, we shall have created a race of supermen of which the rest of the world may well beware'.

Mr. Chamberlain was taken by surprise by the events in Norway. The Germans, springing from their hiding-places in the merchant ships, were already in Narvik, in the far north of Norway, on the day of the attack, April 9th, 1940. Mr. Chamberlain was very doubtful whether this could be correct, and thought they

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were probably in another place, Larvik, in the south of Norway. He was, however, convinced that Hitler had blundered, that he had done the very thing we might have hoped for and yet not have dared to hope for — he had put out his head to be hit.

The history of the way the put-out-head was hit is one of the most calamitous in the history of British arms. A few days before the head-was-put-out-to-be-hit, the British force raised to help-the-Finns, and trained, equipped and clothed for the purpose of campaigning in such a country and such a climate, was disbanded, to the bitter disappointment and dejection of its members, of whom I knew one. It was thus not available for immediate dispatch to Norway to hit the head-that-had-been-put-out, the armies of the man-who-had-blundered.

Of the force that *was* ultimately dispatched, another of Mr. Chamberlain's men, Mr. Burgin, the Minister of Supply, who had at the time of Munich declared Mr. Chamberlain to be the greatest character of all time, was reported to say that no British expeditionary force had ever left our shores so well equipped; he was photographed holding a white snow suit in his hand as an earnest of this.

The Germans quickly overran Norway, and the unfortunate British force which was sent to hit-the-head-that-had-been-put-out was re-embarked and withdrawn two months later. Of it, the War Office, in September 1940, said: 'They could not win because they had almost no air support and scarcely any artillery and were untrained and unprepared and ill supplied and equipped for the conditions in which they had to fight.'

It is a fitting epitaph for a period in Britain's history, in British politics, which is terrible to think about and to look back on. The withdrawal from Norway, and later from Dunkirk, were the far-retching consequences of the things that old men did in the years between 1933 and 1939. I say far-retching consequences and I mean far-retching consequences. Far-retching fits to a 't'. They make you sick.

And the Norwegian fiasco made Britain sick. True, at the beginning of May, with the disaster in France almost upon us,

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another of Mr. Chamberlain's lieutenants, Sir Samuel Hoare, now our Ambassador in Spain, Sir Samuel Hoare of 'don't listen to the jitterbugs' and 'the golden age is coming' said: 'To-day our wings are spread over the Arctic. They are sheathed in ice. To-morrow the sun of victory will touch them with its golden light, and the wings that flashed over the great waters of the North will bear us homewards once more to the "peace with honour" of a free people and the victory of a noble race.'

But England, Britain, knew and felt differently from these incorrigible babblers, whose words were always gainsaid by events as soon as they had uttered them.

I am fairly adroit in the use of words but I cannot describe the feelings of despair which filled the minds of such men as myself at that time. Would nothing move the country, we bitterly and hopelessly asked? Would nothing rid us of the pestilent incompetents who so obstinately clung to office? Would nothing ever make them see a yard in front of their noses, would they never foresee and thwart a move of Hitler's? Would nothing ever shake their smug self-satisfaction, break them of the habit of ridiculous complacency? Would nothing stir them or induce them to accelerate our preparations?

The avalanche was almost upon us and still they dozed in their clubs, went off for their week-ends, still more than a million unemployed walked the streets, still there was hardly any visible sign of preparedness in England, still war-production lagged and dallied. Were we going to lie down and die in a ditch?

Whitsun approached, and the House of Commons calmly proposed, at the behest of the Tory Party, to adjourn for its fortnight. Woolwich Arsenal was to close down for three or four days, the factories at Sheffield for four or five days, some of the coal mines for three or four days; the workers had no enthusiasm for Mr. Chamberlain, who seemingly thought of the war first and foremost as a price-and-wage-struggle, why should they?

It was a terrible time, a nightmare of the most hideous kind. I walked in a black abyss from which there seemed no exit.

At last the eruption came. The House of Commons deserved

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little credit for it; it was driven to act, at the last instant, by that feeling of oppressive fear, that longing for a change, in the mind of the country. There was a retching and a heaving in the belly of England, and it spewed the Chamberlain Government out.

The scene in the House, when it was at last stirred into activity by that feeling of mortal fear and discouragement and bewilderment in the country outside — a feeling that had to be experienced to be understood — was, it is true, in the grand tradition. Sad, that since then the House seems to have sunk back into its old lifelessness and listlessness, which promise no reinvigoration when this war is over.

But in those days of early May it offered, at least and at last, a picture worthy to rank with any in its history, and one that scarcely any other Parliament in the world could achieve.

May it not have been the old dog's last kick. Many who then 'spoke for England', who clearly saw the danger and most forcibly and eloquently told of it, who fearlessly called on the Government to go, have since, in office, become silent and seemingly complacent, like their forerunners. May they look back and remember to what disasters complacency led.

It began, that debate on 'the conduct of the war' which, by way of Norway, may have saved England, with a speech by Mr. Chamberlain, who a few days before had said he was 'satisfied that the balance of advantage in Norway lay up to the present with the Allied Forces', and who now feared 'that the people of this country do not yet realize the extent or the imminence of the threat which is impending against us'.

This was the kind of remark, from such a quarter, which brought people like myself in imminent danger of an apoplexy.

Mr. Chamberlain was supported by several of the older Tory champions, from the villa-and-tea-party constituencies, who suggested that in that great emergency 'party politics' should be forgotten, which is the familiar Tory cry when the Tory Party seems to be getting into a mess.

Then the first 'voice for England' came from Sir Roger Keyes, who had led the Nelsonian venture against Zeebrugge in the last

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year of the 1914-18 war. Sir Roger Keyes was no orator, and did not like orating. Now he had to speak, whether he liked it or not; his prescience of mortal danger was too great for him to be silent. Lady Keyes, that morning, had made the brilliant suggestion that he put on his admiral's uniform and so he appeared, with the medal ribbons illuminating his blue coat and the golden rings climbing up his sleeve. Through his speech ran a note of dignified resentment at the scant notice that had been taken of his suggestions during the Norwegian campaign — but then, that was the lot of all suggestions made by men of real knowledge and practical experience in the years before this war and the first nine months of it.

He had come in uniform, said Sir Roger, to speak for 'some officers and men of the seagoing, fighting Navy, who are very unhappy'. It was not their fault that the German warships and transports which had forced their way into Norwegian ports by treachery had not been followed in and destroyed, that the enemy had been left in undisputed possession of vulnerable ports and aerodromes for nearly a month, and allowed to pour in reinforcements, tanks, guns and transport. If the Navy had been more courageously employed it could have done much to prevent these unhappy happenings. The capture of Trondjem Fjord, with its vital aerodromes and quays, could have been speedily effected. But the naval authorities responsible 'seem to have concentrated on the naval hazards and to have been blind to the dangers which the army would encounter if effective naval action in their support was not immediate and resolute'. When 'at length' he had had an opportunity of giving his views he was told there was no difficulty in going into Trondjem Fjord, but it was not necessary 'as the army was making good progress and the situation in the Mediterranean made it undesirable to risk ships'. When he had seen 'another Gallipoli looming ahead' he had importuned the Admiralty and War Cabinet to let him take all responsibility and organize and lead the attack. The British general advancing along the only road from Steinkjer to Trondjem, in the hope of finding British ships to assist him there, had found instead two German destroyers which opened fire on his flank, transported

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troops and landed them behind his advanced guard, which they captured or destroyed, thus defeating the whole expedition. It was 'a shocking story of ineptitude, which I assure the House ought never to have been allowed to happen'. He seemed, said Sir Roger, to have been unfortunate in the period of his birth. At Gallipoli he was considered too junior, as a captain and acting commodore, for his advice to be listened to, but the forcing of the Dardanelles, which he repeatedly urged, was now recognized as an operation which could not have failed and would have shortened the war. It was a brilliant conception of the First Lord (then Mr. Winston Churchill), but was defeated by his Principal Naval Adviser of those days. If only, said Sir Roger, he could at that time have placed on the table 'the credentials of Zeebrugge' the forcing of the Dardanelles would have been accomplished. In the present war, thanks to his early promotion, he was supposed to be too senior and out of date for his opinions to be worth consideration.

The speech of Sir Roger Keyes, who did not like speaking, was one of the best the House of Commons had heard for many a day. At last, the voice of England was heard again.

It was supported by the diminutive and fiery Mr. Amery, who was inspired, first, to withering irony ('Surely, for the Government of the last ten years to have bred a band of warrior statesmen would have been little short of a miracle. We have waited for eight months and the miracle has not come to pass. Can we afford to wait any longer?') and, last, to a flash of oratorical genius, when he quoted Cromwell's words to the Long Parliament: 'You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!'

Seldom was so apt a quotation. How little could Cromwell have guessed, hundreds of years before, when he said that, what use would be made of his words centuries later, in mortal crisis for the country. These few words, handed down the centuries, might have been especially composed by a jury of present day Britons for utterance to Mr. Chamberlain and his Government.

When they had been spoken, more members of Mr. Chamber-



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lain's personal bodyguard in the Tory Party rose and reminded Mr. Amery that Cromwell, after that encounter with the Long Parliament, ultimately went, and Parliament ultimately survived. That is unfortunately true to-day. That same Parliament which between 1935 and 1939 let England drift into this war still sits, God help us.

But on that day in May 1939 the urgent thing, in England's dire emergency, was to get rid of the Chamberlain Government, not Parliament, and Sir Roger Keyes and Mr. Amery struck the first two blows.

Another voice spoke for England — that of Major Milner, who represented South East Leeds. Yorkshiremen recruited from his constituency were serving in Norway and he feared that 'many of them — I sincerely hope the number is not large, but we do not know the facts — will have been sacrificed for what I can only say is the incompetence, lack of foresight and lack of preparation on the part of the Government during the last month or two . . . What I complain of — and I understand this is the feeling of the majority of honourable Members who have spoken — is the obvious lack of foresight, inadequate preparation, misleading expectations and statements, and the deadly complacency of some Members of the Government which has even been in evidence in the debate to-day'.

Another speaker, Earl Winterton, made the fantastic suggestion — in that Parliament! — that there should be 'some form of inquiry' into the circumstances of the fiasco in Norway, 'possibly a committee or commission of inquiry presided over by a Law Lord with two High Court judges, who would have power to examine both military and civil officials concerned, the lowest and the highest, from the Prime Minister to the Chief of Staff'.

Now this extraordinary proposal, if it had been adopted, would have demolished at a single blow the principle of the non-accountability of British Ministers on which the whole system of government was based and from which the whole decay of England sprang. If this proposal had been adopted, and conscientiously carried out, it might never again have been possible for one man

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to climb the ladder of office, to its very top, by the rungs of one disaster and failure after another; to come into the inner clique without any merit but simply because he was somebody's cousin or somebody's friend or had been to somebody's school or had contributed so-much to the Party Funds; and once inside that coterie, without regard for his capacity or record, to pass from one high office to another; for instance, even at the present time, as I write, there are in our Government outstanding failures who have successively held such offices as those of Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister for Air, Minister for Health, Postmaster General, Home Secretary, etcetera etcetera.

If the 'Committee-of-Inquiry-into-past-mistakes' idea were ever adopted this system of the little inter-related group would break down. That is why, when the chickens of the Chamberlain regime came home to roost on the coasts of Norway and the beaches of Dunkirk, the clamant cry, 'No recriminations!' was raised in the journals of the newspaper-lords and on the Tory benches. That is why nothing more was ever heard of Earl Winterton's suggestion. That was why, when the far greater disaster of Dunkirk occurred, when England was full of embittered and humiliated and angry officers and men back from those beaches, no such proposal was ever renewed.

This memorable debate in the House of Commons was as different from the normally dreary discussions of that assembly as a battle-scene painted in oils is different from a photogravure reproduction of 'Dignity and Impudence' by Landseer. This debate had colour. The people who spoke in it were alive. Some of them had not long to live — some of the loudest protestors against the clamour for a change were soon to sink into the grave, some of those who sought to placate, strangely, were soon to fall in action.

Of these was that enigmatic, contrary, inexplicable man, of whom I have already spoken, Sir Arnold Wilson, who by his obstinate wrong-headedness in the matter of Hitler and National Socialism had greatly helped to lull and delude the country and who then, when war came, though well into his fifties, sprang into

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the uniform of an airgunner. He was therefore a fighting-man, when he spoke, and yet, with England on the uttermost brink of disaster, he was 'conscious of no clash of loyalties' in his breast, he gently reproached Sir Roger Keyes, he suggested that the Government ought to be freed from the one remaining means of supervising and checking and controlling it — from the necessity of appearing to answer debates in the House of Commons!

Yet this Sir Arnold Wilson, who was seemingly so utterly without political vision, who loved his country and could see nothing wrong in it as long as it was ruled by the Tory Party, this Sir Arnold Wilson had to count himself 'fortunate in having an opportunity to speak, for within an hour I must rejoin my unit'. The men with whom he worked, he said, 'have flown up and down the Valley of the Shadow of Death again and again and will go on doing so until victory crowns their efforts'. He himself was very soon not to return from the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He was a good Englishman, of the best. But, for life's sake, could he see nothing in England that needed curing? How could such a man, at such a crisis, have soothingly and reassuringly defended the Tory Party, have gently rebuked those who saw the mortal danger?

Even at this moment, when the great judge, History, was looking at England and hesitating whether or not to put on the black cap, courage of an almost superhuman kind was seemingly needed, in England, to criticize a man who, physically and spiritually, was so completely the sum of everything the Tory Party idolized as Mr. Chamberlain.

True, in the world outside he had few admirers, save in an obscure newspaper speaking for that General Franco whom Hitler and Mussolini, with the tacit connivance of the Tory Government, had saved in Spain: this rare tribute was gratefully salvaged by *The Times* from a mass of caustic comments.

But the *Sydney Sun*, a leading Australian newspaper, spoke the mind of Britain outside Britain when it said: 'What has been revealed is so shocking in its implications of deficient preparations for an emergency that Mr. Chamberlain's complacent outlook

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evokes the gravest doubts throughout the Empire of the Government's capacity to put the necessary drive into the war effort.'

Nevertheless, a word spoken against Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons, as perusal of its debates at that time suggests, still demanded courage of the sort usually found only in martyrs. Literary explorers of the future may be surprised by the trepidation they will discover in the words of some who did eventually steel themselves to express the opinion that Mr. Chamberlain should go.

When the debate was resumed on May 8th — Sir Arnold Wilson, due to return to his flying duty, had not had time to speak all his thoughts on the preceding evening, and a very few days later he had fallen among the victims of the system of incompetency and sloth which he defended — Mr. Chamberlain had with resentment noticed the tendency to criticize himself that had become apparent and he rose to say:

I do not seek to evade criticism, but I say this to my friends in the House — and I have friends in the House. No Government can prosecute a war efficiently unless it has public and parliamentary support. I accept the challenge. I welcome it indeed. At least we shall see who is with us and who is against us, and I call on my friends to support us in the Lobby to-night.

And there you have it — the crack of the Whip! The admonition, the threat, the warning! All Tory Members knew what penalties lay behind these words — relegation, political outlawry, ostracism in the party. 'My friends in the House.' 'I *have* friends in the House.' 'I call on my friends.' Where, in such phrases as these, was England, and her dire plight? This was Party. With mortal calamity knocking at the door, the old Party game was still being played.

Mr. Lloyd George, hale and vigorous at 77, his white locks fluttering, burst into the debate. 'This half-prepared, half-baked expeditionary force, without any combination at all between the Army and the Navy . . . We are all equally proud of our soldiers. All the more shame that we should have made fools of them.'

Mr. Chamberlain's particular bodyguard, his 'friends', the Tory

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Old Guard, the big business baronets, the shut-eye generals and admirals, the Hitler-is-a-nice-man-really colonels, began to interrupt Lloyd George. They could not stomach this. With searing irony he told them: 'You will have to listen to it, either now or later on. Hitler does not answer the whips of the Patronage Secretary.'

Then, pointing accusingly at the figures on the Government Bench, those omniscient and all-versatile men who had fallen upstairs, from office to office, for so many years, who had with cheery cries and exhilarating promises led England from disappointment to misfortune and from misfortune to disaster, he asked:

Is there anyone in this House who will say that he is satisfied with the speed and efficiency of the preparations in any respect for air, for Army, for Navy? Everybody is disappointed. Everybody knows that whatever was done was done half-heartedly, ineffectively, without drive and unintelligently.

The Front Bench figures remained silent. They had no answer. Their silence gave consent. Everybody knew the truth of this. Outside Parliament the belly of England ached from this Government. But they still did not think of going. Barnacles, they would need to be prized off. The debate went on, while at the Dutch and Belgian frontiers the Germans massed, once more.

Then came Lloyd George's peroration, another of the contributions to this debate which lifted it far above the level of any that moribund House had heard for long enough. Again the voice of England broke through. He told Mr. Chamberlain: 'The Prime Minister is not in a position to make his personality in this respect inseparable from the interests of the country.'

Said Mr. Chamberlain: 'What is the meaning of that observation? I have never represented that my personality . . .'

Mr. Lloyd George: 'The right hon. Gentleman definitely appealed on a question which is a great national, Imperial and world issue. He said, "I have got my friends"'. It is not a question of who are the Prime Minister's friends. The Prime Minister must remember that he has met this formidable foe of ours in peace and

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in war. He has always been worsted. He is not in a position to put it on the ground of friendship. He has appealed for sacrifice. The nation is prepared for every sacrifice so long as it has leadership, so long as the Government show clearly what they are aiming at and so long as the nation is confident that those who are leading it are doing their best. I say solemnly that the Prime Minister should give an example of sacrifice, because there is nothing which can contribute more to victory in this war than that he should sacrifice the seals of office.'

This was oratory in the grand manner. Here was an entirely new, a revolutionary idea thrown into the debate. That a member, perhaps several members of the pass-the-sweets coterie, should *themselves* sacrifice something, should even retire from office — they, who from banquet to banquet had been telling the country that it must tighten its belt, they who, come war, come peace, would never know any other world than that of Whitehall and the Pall Mall Clubs, of the house-parties and shooting-parties in Yorkshire and Scotland!

The historian of the future will be gratified to notice that a venerable Tory Member promptly succeeded Mr. Lloyd George, remarking that if he thought his vote that night would put the Prime Minister out, he certainly would not give it, and that 'such scenes do not add to the dignity of the House'.

Ah, that dignity, which, in the opinion of such long-standing, or rather long-seated Tory Members reaches its highest perfection when it most closely resembles the dignity of the graveyard. Peace, perfect peace. The twilight atmosphere, the heavy and soporific air, the pleasant hush — by Gad, sir, a man can get a nap here. What's that? They want to turn the P.M. out? Gad, sir, what is the House coming to? Is this democracy? Is this dignity? A man can't even get his nap nowadays.

Mr. Lambert, of South Molton, who said he had been in the House nearly as long as Mr. Lloyd George, deplored the re-emergence of party politics at such a crisis, for he clearly saw that any criticism of Mr. Chamberlain could only come from base or selfish men. 'I say to the Labour Members that they are not help-

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ing in the conduct of the war when they continually snipe at the Prime Minister and his friends. We are told that we are all "yes-men". I am not a "yes-man". I am as independent as any man over there . . . But I have a genuine apprehension for the future of the country. These acrimonious debates are undermining the strength of the country by undermining confidence in those who have the direction of affairs. What suggestion has been made for the change of Government which is proposed? What sort of Government is suggested? Who is to be Prime Minister? After all this is the House of Commons, democratically elected, and I ask hon. Members whom they suggest as Prime Minister, other than my right hon. friend the present Prime Minister?"

(Mr. Chamberlain, may I remark, had some six months to live when this plea was made that no other man could lead the country!)

He did not mind, proceeded Mr. Lambert, if the criticism levelled at Mr. Chamberlain were 'legitimate', but he had heard 'all kinds of attacks that are animated not so much by a desire for the good of the country as by political motives. . . .'

This was a most typical contribution to the debate by one of the friends upon whom Mr. Chamberlain called. Just as men who had warned England against Hitler were called the enemies of Mr. Chamberlain's noble policy of appeasement before the war began, so were those who criticized his conduct of the war after it began called anti-patriots, underminers and the like. Their criticism was not 'legitimate'. It was not prompted by concern for the good, indeed for the salvation of the country, but by 'political motives'.

By this method you never can go wrong.

Mr. Duff Cooper rose. 'We have had many defeats in these last three disastrous years. Again and again we have met in this House, sometimes suddenly summoned in an emergency, always to record a setback, a disaster, always to listen to the disappointment, the astonishment and the surprise of the Prime Minister . . . In the three Ministerial speeches that we have already heard from the Front Bench, there has not been the slightest admission that

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something is fundamentally wrong with the machinery of Government, that there is something rotten in the State. . . .’

Another voice for England! (Yet most unhappily Mr. Duff Cooper, when he later came to office, seemed to acquire the same sensitiveness as these incompetent forerunners against any suggestion that there was ‘something rotten in the State’, although the Ministry he had thrust upon him often offered reasons to think that this was still the case.)

Then came Colonel Sir George Courthill, of Rye, who also obeyed Mr. Chamberlain’s injunction to follow him into the Government Lobby, with a reproof to those irresponsible critics who sought ‘to make a mountain out of the Norwegian molehill’.

Followed Commander Bower, of Cleveland, an officer serving on the Naval Staff, who spoke bitterly of ‘the dead hand from above’ that had descended and stopped the Navy from succouring and saving the expedition to Norway. He made a very bold reference to Mr. Winston Churchill, who at the time of this debate had entered the Government, which he had so long and so valiantly sought to convince of the danger that threatened England, as First Lord of the Admiralty. Commander Bower addressed these notable words to Mr. Churchill, words which are still of the first importance as I write this book and will be of importance to England for long to come:

The First Lord of the Admiralty will this evening, I understand, wind up this debate. He is a great orator, and I have no doubt he will put over a very convincing case, but I am certain that he will not use his great gift of oratory, that harlot of the arts, to present a case in which he does not believe. It is therefore with considerable interest that I shall listen to hear how he contrives to defend a case which up to quite recently he disliked as much as I do.

(Some months later Commander Bower complained of having been sidetracked, victimized and relegated by appointment to a very minor seagoing command.)

Mr. Churchill, in the event, made a fighting speech in defence of the Government’s action in Norway, and appealed to those



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who thought Mr. Chamberlain a disaster for England, as he himself at times seemed to have thought, to 'let pre-war feuds die' and 'let party interest be ignored', to 'let the whole ability and forces of the nation be hurled into the struggle and all the strong horses be pulling on the collar'.

Precisely that was the wish of the nation. Precisely that was the thing it could not get under Mr. Chamberlain's leadership. Precisely this was the reason the belly of England ached to be rid of his Government. The country could not, at one and the same time, stomach all the injunctions to 'put its shoulder to the wheel' and the inaction and incapacity of that inert and incompetent administration.

When the vote was taken on the question, 'That this House do now adjourn', 281 of Mr. Chamberlain's 'friends' trooped obediently into his Lobby, and 200 Members went into the other Lobby.

This meant that, of the Society of Friends, more than forty had at long last rebelled, more than forty habitual yessers had decided to say No, more than forty units in the herd had paused on the brink of that Gadarene slope and refused to follow-my-leader any farther, more than forty British Members of Parliament, on the threshold of Britain's darkest hour, had perceived the black abyss into which she threatened to fall, more than forty full-grown representatives of the male sex had found the inner strength to disobey a thrice-underlined command from The Party Whip!

The most distinguished members of the Privy Council, at least, such as were not inside the Government, voted against it.

And a score of young Tory Members in uniform were among those who said 'No'.

The Government's majority, 81, was still ample in all normal parliamentary times, but in that pitiful Parliament which was born in 1935, to avert war, and still exists as I write, this was equivalent to a catastrophic defeat for the Government.

Thus, when the debate was continued on May 9th, Mr. Clement Davies of Montgomery, remarking that the next onslaught might come at any moment (it came within twelve hours) and objecting to the proposal that the House should adjourn over

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Whitsuntide as if nothing had happened, were happening, or was likely to happen, said:

While this clock is ticking on, one knows not what danger is awaiting Holland, Belgium or other peoples. Is it right that when these people are trembling as to what fate may befall them, we should disperse for a holiday? In my submission we should not.

Mr. Boothby, of East Aberdeen, followed to suggest that the vote showed the Government not to possess the confidence of the House and the country in sufficient measure, and loud shouts of disagreement rose from the serried ranks of the friends still sitting behind Mr. Chamberlain. Sir H. Morris Jones, of Denbigh, remarked that, in addition to those habitual supporters of the Government who had voted against it, a large number of others had abstained, himself among them, and 'as one who for five years has known something about the tutelage of the Whip's Office and all its discipline' he suggested that this abstention was an important thing, even though it might not have been 'a very heroic course'.

All through the debate crept still timid references to 'The Whip' and to the great effort of mind which had been needed to move Tory Members to disobey it, even in such a crisis. These are the most revealing things in that fateful debate for those who wish to understand the causes of the war and the dangers of the future — for the Party Machine is still intact, and the Parliament it ruled is still with us.

The debate closed, to all effect, with the speech of one of these younger Tory Members, Mr. Richard Law, of Kingston-upon-Hull, who is the son of a former Prime Minister, the Canadian-born Bonar Law. He had already once braved the Party Whip and spoken for England, as long before as March, when the Finns were in collapse, when he said:

In the last few years I and every hon. Member have witnessed one or other prominent Member of the Government — the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Lord Privy Seal — come down to the House and stand at that Box in the midst of the wreckage of some policy or other, in

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the midst of some defeat or other, and explain that there was nothing that could possibly have been done. That has happened time after time. It happened in the case of Austria, it happened in the case of Czechoslovakia, it happened in the case of Poland, and now it has happened in the case of Finland. Each time it happens it makes the next time easier and the next time more likely . . . to be associated with policies which always end in defeat and frustration does not lend strength to your hand when you tackle new policies from a different angle. . . .

Now Mr. Law said he regretted that the debate had had to be held, but it was inevitable.

It was inevitable, in the main, for one reason, that is that there has been in this House over a number of years a too highly perfected machinery of party discipline. The reason this Debate had to take place was that there was no other way in which Members of this House, who held genuine convictions and who had serious and genuine grounds for uneasiness, could bring them to the real attention of the Government. On other occasions when there has been criticism from these benches the whole machinery of party has got into gear, and by a variety of devices and stratagems criticism has been suppressed, those who voiced it have been denigrated and the whole thing glossed over. The lesson we have learned from the Debate is that if you sit on the safety valve of a boiler the boiler will, in the end, blow up. . . .

Democracy? Where was, here, the fault of youth? Here you see how wars are allowed to come about!

Mr. Law went on:

There is some talk to-day about reconstruction of the Government . . . Effective reconstruction might have been possible some months ago, or even some weeks ago, but the opportunity was lost . . . There must be a new Government and it must be, very probably, under new leadership. Reconstruction and shuffling about of the furniture again simply will not do this time . . . I myself have been accused of nourishing a somewhat

## RESIGNATION AT MARBLE ARCH

curious unaccountable personal spite against the Prime Minister. I can assure the House that that is complete nonsense. . . .

Save for a few more yelps and yaps from the more fervid Friends, this was the end of the debate, which was 'adjourned accordingly at One Minute before Four o'clock, on Thursday, May 9th, until Tuesday, May 21st, pursuant to the Resolution of the House this day'.

A stupendous debate, magnificent to read and re-read. It reminds me of those early films in which the galloping messenger, the various passages of his thundering and dust-accompanied ride shown while the victim-to-be-saved awaits the shots of the firing-squad, arrives just as the officer-in-command raises his sword to give the order to fire.

That was the position of England. If the country was yet to be saved, and that seemed very questionable, it could only be saved by spewing out that Government. It had to be purged of that administration if it meant to rise and fight. It could not have the one and do the other. I have described the Debate of May 7th, 8th and 9th, 1940, at some length because it was one of the most important in our history. It was, indeed, one of life or death. It saved our life. It did not cure the illness which nearly killed us. The 'too perfect party machine' which had brought us to this mortal plight, and the parliament it had produced, still remained. Both were taken over by the new rulers. . . .

As the red light changed to yellow and then green I released the brake and my car moved down Oxford Street, in the gathering dusk. That morning, a few hours after the close of the great Debate, the Germans had poured into Holland and Belgium. Now we're for it, I thought that morning, when a voice from London told me the news on the telephone, now we shall see about the 'Bore War'. I itched to be in London. I quickly took my car out of the garage, and drove hard all day to get there before dark.

I passed through the familiar, sleepy countryside. I hardly saw a soldier. In the villages cars clustered round the inns, farm

## NEW WARS FOR OLD

labourers idly guided lazy horses along the streets, children wandered about, mechanics tinkered with motor lorries. All the way to London I thought, 'How can this country survive, under such leadership?' I no longer hoped, then, that it would ever change. I had come to believe that nothing could shift that government. It would be there for ever, I thought; if some of its members should ever die, none would notice.

In desperate despondency I turned on the radio as I reached Marble Arch and drove down Oxford Street. Mr. Chamberlain was speaking. He was announcing his resignation!

I listened almost in disbelief. Could this be true? I had heard his voice after the invasion of Austria, after Munich, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia. It had been as empty of human feeling as a biscuit tin. After the attack on Poland even the House of Commons, even Members on his own side of the House, had been stirred to resentment by this dryasdust, this matter-of-fact, this no-sentiment-in-business tone.

Now, for the first time, I heard feeling and emotion in his voice. He was announcing his own resignation.

Against all my better reason hope leaped in me again. At last! Perhaps it was not yet too late, after all. I put my car away and walked quickly to my hotel, eager to hear what tidings the day had brought. Were the Hollanders fighting? Were the Belgians fighting? We had long known this would come; had Mr. Chamberlain this time preconcerted our measures to succour them, had our plans been prepared, were we, this once, ready?

I ran up the steps and quickly scanned the reports that were coming in over the tape.

## CHAPTER 7

### GIANT DESPAIR

I SAT, with a German, on the terrace of a big house with a big garden in the north of London, on a glorious spring evening. The garden was heavy with the scent of flowers. The vast city stretched beneath us and lost itself in the hazy distance. My host's pretty young wife, a South German girl, busily supervised the preparation of the evening meal. Their little son played about us. A gardener placidly mowed the lawn. It was the most lovely May evening.

I did not know my host. He had sought me out, introduced himself as a close friend of Otto Strasser, the man whom I knew to be Hitler's most dangerous enemy, the man about whom I had written a book. He had invited me to dine. We talked of the 1914-18 war, in which he had been a flying officer and a most active enemy of ours in the East. I wondered what thoughts now filled his breast; if he was what he said he was, and Hitler came to England, what would become of him and his wife and child? I *knew* what thoughts filled my own breast; if Hitler came, that would be the end, and could we now prevent him?

The days had been laden with tidings that exceeded the worst anticipations. True, we had, at last, the new Government, Churchill, and Eden, but nearly all the old men, who had brought us to this pass, were still in it; they had just withdrawn a step or two, and the indignant clamour for their dismissal was silenced with the reproof, 'No recriminations', they were even defended by the new-comers whom they had so long and so bitterly kept from office.

The Germans, sending clouds of parachutists from the skies, working hand-in-hand with the traitors within-the-gates, dealing death-from-the-air to 30,000 defenceless civilians in Rotterdam

## NEW WARS FOR OLD

in half an hour, had overrun Holland, had nearly overrun Belgium, and were fiercely attacking the French and British.

Would the Maginot Line hold? In my heart, although I still did not know the disastrous story of those wasted nine months, when the gap-was-not-filled, I felt that it would not. True, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Ironside, but a few weeks before, had said 'We would welcome an attack. We are sure of ourselves. We have no fears . . . It is too late now for anything the Germans may start. . . .' But we had so often been told the same sort of thing before. Within me a certain premonition of coming disaster stirred.

My German acquaintance was very pessimistic, so that I put on a front entirely different from that inward trepidation. He, at all events, must not know what I feared. We turned on the radio, heard that the Germans had broken through at Sedan; the Maginot Line, I realized at that moment, had been an imaginary line, the campaign in France was over — and our armies in France?

The German shook his head despondently. 'That is very bad,' he said, and he spoke bitterly, uncomprehendingly, of the very things I despaired of, in my mind, of the unpreparedness of England, of the refusal to awaken and be alert. I gainsaid him. I told him he did not know the doggedness, the stamina, the steel core of the British.

As I said these things I had almost lost the last spark of hope in them myself. But he must not know that.

Eden's voice came through the radio, announcing that the wish of Englishmen to be given arms to defend themselves, so that at least they would not need to be shot down defenceless or to surrender themselves into captivity from lack of arms, was to be gratified. The 'Home Guard' (at that time, the Local Defence Volunteers) would be formed, and all good men and true could now spring to the aid of their country.

'At last,' I said exultantly to the German, 'that is what millions of us have been waiting for. The news is good, you see.'

'Um,' he said, obviously sceptical but not wishing openly to disagree, 'yes, the news is good.'

## GIANT DESPAIR

Good? My only hat! When I think of those days!

In almost less than no time a million and a half Britons, who for months had cursed and languished in despairing impotence, rushed to join the Home Guard. They filled in forms — inevitably, in triplicate — at the police stations, and these went to join the other mountains of paper which officialdom was building. Weeks and months went by, and the Home Guard had no other weapons than the few shotguns they could borrow from local squires and farmers, no uniforms, no organization. They walked about armed with sticks! England was empty of arms and none knew when any would arrive. Staunch patriots told me that if the Germans came they would fight them with their hands, and they made me sick at heart even while my heart bled for them; they had slumbered too long, in their island, even to know that a man with his bare hands cannot get near enough to a man with a machine gun to fight him.

As the days went by the news became darker and darker, like the thickening of the twilight on a winter's afternoon. There was but one tiny ray of light — the performance of our airmen wherever they met Göring's men. I did not then know how important, how vital, it was, this little beam.

The Germans rushed headlong on and drove deep wedges between the French and the British in the south, between the Belgians and British in the north. They were trying to cut us out. I foresaw that something worse was about to happen than even I had bargained for, or at all events, that it would happen far more quickly and at far less cost to the Germans than I had ever thought possible — the collapse of France.

The French, with their Maginot Line and their great armies, were to fight less staunchly than the much-criticized Poles! We know, now, that they were not meant to fight-to-the-last, that the history of their collapse belongs to the dark political machinations of the 1933-39 era, not to the campaign itself. We *should* understand.

About this time, when from contemplation of the scene in France, on the one hand, and the picture of England, on the other,



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I was in the slough of despond, I came to London and met, for the first time since 1918, a man I had known in that war. This was Air Marshal Portal, who in 1918 was Major Portal, in command of that Royal Air Force squadron with which I served in France; I had last seen him when, my face swathed in bandages, I was being removed feet-foremost from the fray, and he had then given me a long cigarette holder to enable me to smoke in spite of my bandages and my swollen lips.

I had never seen or heard of him since that war and had not even known whether he remained in the Service, but I was glad, now, to recall that when I was writing *Insanity Fair* my memory had prompted me to record the unusual gift for leadership which I, a subaltern, and all the other officers of his squadron had remarked in him, for now he was a very senior officer in charge of one of our most powerful instruments in this war — our bombing aircraft.

I thus realized that this man (a few months later he became Commander of the whole Air Force) was to be pitted against another man I had known, one Hermann Göring, that these two men, indeed, might have more to say about victory or defeat, in the war that was resumed in 1939, than any other two men, for I knew that air-power could decisively affect our chances. Göring, at Hitler's behest given within a few moments of his advent to power in 1933, had built 'the greatest air force of all time', at first secretly, with extraordinary skill and cunning, and then openly, and its might had been proved in the most terrible manner in Poland and Holland and Belgium and France. Only the Royal Air Force had been able to stand up to it at all.

Now Portal, if England were only given time, was to build an even bigger one, and when that day came, I knew, the war would be over save the shouting. But *would* England be given time? That was the question which gnawed at my mind, as I waited and watched for the collapse of France. I thought of England, unready and unarmed, and of our armies in France. What would happen to them?

I met Portal and lunched with him in a club, in the English

## GIANT DESPAIR

fashion. Nations may rise and fall, wars come and go, but lunch-in-the-club goes on, all the leaders of England congregate in Pall Mall. I do not like the fashion, it seems to me too remote from the lives of the millions outside, this little leather arm-chair and smoking-room life of the clubs, but it has long been so, and seemingly will long remain so. Near by sat the new Air Minister, Sir Archibald Sinclair, and the new Financial Secretary to the War Office, Richard Law, two of the men who had spoken so bravely for England in the momentous debates of May. Here and there a young or a younger man was seeping through, here and there vigour and energy were making little holes in the upper crust of inertia and incompetency.

This was particularly true of the Air Force, where young men were rising to the top (and later, under Portal's command, were in increasing numbers to rise). But even this was not a sign of any real change; rather was it the result of an accident of birth, for the Royal Air Force was born in the 1914-18 war and its fore-ordained leaders were thus bound to be of that generation. The generation of 1914-18, the lost generation (and I do not mean those who died, but those who survived), was still on the whole kept out of everything by selfish and incompetent age. Nevertheless, the youth of the Royal Air Force is the secret of its almost miraculous achievements, which did more than any other one thing to save England; if it had been twenty years older, if it had had time to become the browsing-ground of an aged clique, we might have lost the war.

We talked of this and that, and particularly of Germany, and at one moment Portal made a remark which stuck in my mind like a burr during the following months of suspense. 'If we lose this war,' he said, 'but we shall not . . .' and I interrupted him. 'Do you not think we shall?' I asked, for at that time this was for me the question that haunted my days and nights, and the coming collapse of France was clear to foresee. 'No,' he said, 'the invasion is a very difficult thing . . .' and he went to explain his reasons for thinking this.

I have told of this incident in order to anticipate its sequel. During the months of harassing expectation that followed, I

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thought of his remark continually, and with increasing respect as the weeks went by, the invasion did not come, the country gradually began to prepare its defences, aeroplanes and guns started pouring in from America, and even the Home Guard obtained arms.

Portal, I thought, even though he spoke before Dunkirk, must have seen something, known something, that I did not see or know, to be so confident, then, that we should not lose, for I had thought our defeat to be a most dire and imminent possibility. In November I met him again, when he was Commander of the Royal Air Force, and began the conversation by reminding him of that remark, and asking him whether, and why, he had really been so sure that we should not be defeated.

He answered quite frankly, that within a few days of our first meeting he had thought his own life probably to be approaching its end, had expected to go out with a load of bombs and damage as many Germans as he could. He had expected an immediate invasion, and he had expected this to gain a strong foothold in this country.

He still believed — and this was where I still differed from him — that it would have been defeated in the end, because the people of this country would have fought and died to the last man and woman to prevent it from succeeding. I did not share this view, because civilian resistance, risings or insurrections against a foreign occupying power, though they may once have been possible, are not possible since the invention of the machine gun. I did not say this, but Air Chief Marshal Portal may have read my thoughts, for he paused and said reflectively, 'Of course, I don't really know, has it ever happened in history, the resistance of men to the point of extermination?' The answer is that this has never happened, and is in a world peopled by human beings impossible, since the coming of the machine gun.

So we were as near as that, and my fears and feelings in those days of May and June 1940 were not wrong! A miracle was worked in those days.

After this meeting with a man who may yet play a Nelsonian

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or Wellingtonian part in our history, I stayed awhile in London, waiting on events. The weather was fantastic. There had never been anything like it before in human memory. Strange that the weather, the main and favourite topic of press and public discussion in England at all times, was a forbidden subject just in this year when it was unique. News of it might have 'helped the enemy'.

Day after day and night after night I watched the sun climb into a cloudless sky or the moon into a starlit heaven. 'What a waste,' I thought, with the picture of France in my mind. I hated the weather, now that it was for once that which I had always pined for, because it seemed to have been ordained especially for the furtherance of Hitler's campaigns. Perhaps I was wrong about this; perhaps our airmen would have had less fortune in finding and destroying the Germans in cloudier or rainier times.

As May wore on the news became worse and worse. I returned to the little white house and, looking out despondently upon the gleaming Channel, listened to it on the radio, seething. The King of the Belgians capitulated and the clamour of 'Traitor' arose. He may have been miscalled, and the full story of that time, when it is told, may prove this; I do not know. But had we erred so little, in the past, that we had the right thus to denounce the leaders of the little nations that bore the awful brunt of the impact?

The two prongs of the German armies thrust swiftly towards the Channel coast, the hard-trying British army held between them like a nut in the crackers. The pressure tightened as the two prongs began to close. The tidings in the radio grew less and less as the disaster loomed nearer. German 'mechanized units had infiltrated' we were told, but we must not know where or how far; that would be giving information to the enemy. But the Germans knew where they were and I heard them telling the world this, in their radio. The outstretched arms of their mechanized legions, relentlessly closing round the British army, seized Boulogne, Calais. . . .

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Only a tiny strip of coast remained in the possession of the British armies — Dunkirk. Was even that still in their possession, I asked, as I listened to those voices in the radio, the English voice placidly reciting empty communiqués as if it were reading cricket results, the German voice rabid with exultation and hatred. I waited, at the end of May, from hour to hour, to hear that the Germans had Dunkirk, that the British army in France had been cut off and captured, that England, open and defenceless and unprepared, lay at the mercy of these savage hordes. Was this to be the end, the end I had long feared and warned against? Here it was, on my doorstep. What could now avert it? Was this to be journey's end? I hated to look at the Channel, but looked at it always.

I had no weapon of any kind, although I had filled in the forms for the Home Guard. I was not likely to get one. In Dullmouth all went its placid way. Just about this time I did, at long last, obtain the permission I had long since applied for—to buy a revolver. Could I still get one? Even that was almost impossible to obtain in England at that time. What a position for a man to be in who had fought in the 1914-18 war!

I drove to Exeter and ransacked the city. The gunsmiths laughed at the very idea that they might have any kind of weapon to sell. At last I discovered a revolver in a second-hand shop. It was an ancient weapon, made about the year 1880, and still lay, with a few mouldy-looking bullets, in the plush-lined mahogany case in which some long-dead gunsmith had proudly bedded it. I thought it was more likely to kill me than anyone else, if I should ever fire it.

But it was at least a weapon. I drove back through Newton Abbot, where farmers were placidly buying pigs in the market place, through Torquay, where old ladies were placidly dozing in the shelters on the front, through Dullmouth, where the ferry was lazily plying to and fro, to the little white house.

The 'greatest military disaster in our long history'<sup>1</sup> immediately impended. It might be in progress now, across that peaceful sheet

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill's words.

## GIANT DESPAIR

of water, as I cleaned my venerable revolver in the garden. Behind it lay — the invasion of England and some new world which I did not care even to imagine.

I knew what alien rule meant; I had seen it and its results. The Germans, I knew, were reserving their most sadistic ingenuity for England, if they could overcome her. Nothing they had ever done in any other conquered land compared even palely with that which they would do in England, if they could — only people who have long lived with and studied the Germans as they are after a century of conquest can understand this. They would fling themselves upon the body of England like grave-robbers, like the vulturine despoilers of a corpse. This was the long-thwarted orgasm which they awaited in desperate, tumultuous impatience.

From the windows of the little white house I looked down on a placid, empty sea, and on deserted, open, undefended coasts.

## CHAPTER 8

### CLARION CALL

LIKE the mocking echo of derisive laughter sounded, in those dark days, the words which the new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, uttered:

We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, sets forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

My own conviction is that the second part of this memorable phrase expresses a fallacy. I do not believe that, once the British head had been cut off and the British heart pierced, the British arms and legs could have carried on the struggle — though I well realize that the British fleet would have been a most comforting gift, in that disaster, to the unready people of the United States; our ill wind would, no doubt, have blown them much good in this form.

As I did not believe in this theory about the continuance-of-the-war-from-overseas, as I knew the subjugation of this island would be final and irretrievable calamity, and as I (and some of our foremost leaders, as I have indicated) then feared that this calamity, the penalty of those dreadful years of sloth, was now upon us, I was more interested in the first passage of Mr. Churchill's clarion call — 'we shall fight on the beaches . . . landing grounds . . . fields and streets . . . hills. . . .'

These were the words which, as I say, sounded in those days

## CLARION CALL

like the mocking echoes of derisive laughter. Fight! Yes, if we could only fight. Millions of men throughout the country asked nothing better. But we had no arms. No arms, no arms, no arms — the thought ran endlessly through my mind, and I had to grin bitterly to myself at that talk about fighting . . . on the beaches . . . on the landing grounds . . . in the fields and streets . . . in the hills. We were defenceless. The Home Guard, still embryonic, had no arms. The fate of the army in France hung in the balance. Mr. Churchill, in the same speech, had not been able to promise more than 'There is no reason why we should not in a few months overtake the sudden and serious loss that has come upon us . . .'

A few months! And the invasion impended! The coasts were open and unmanned. We had no arms. How were we to fight? I cursed the men who had brought us to this pass.

Mr. Churchill's clarion call seemed, in those black days, to have been sounded on a cracked bugle. If the Germans contrived to land in force, I knew, there could be no prolonged or effective, inch-by-inch resistance; you cannot fight tanks and machine guns with your hands, neither on the hills nor in the valleys, neither in the streets, nor in the fields.

Later those historic words gained meaning and reality, the clarion call was a real one, clear and strong, it no longer sounded like the mocking laughter of the old men who had left us defenceless. By that time we *had* arms, we could defend the valleys and hills, the fields and streets. A few score, a few hundred fighter pilots gained us that vital space of time. 'Never was so much owed by so many to so few.'

But my hair rises on my scalp even to-day when I think of May, June and July 1940, of the days when an almost defenceless nation, guarded only by that frail shield of air fighters, awaited an invasion in shattering and overwhelming force and thought to oppose it with bare hands — in the streets and fields, in the hills and valleys, on the landing grounds, on the beaches. . . .



## CHAPTER 9

### SPOKEN IN JEST

ONE scene in particular, from those momentous days of the end of May and the beginning of June 1940, impressed itself, by its awful incongruity, upon my mind until my dying day. Travelling to-and-fro along the peaceful Devon coast, which lay baking in the sun, I frequently passed a golf club. Always, sleek and shining cars lay resting in its car park; always, the figures of men could be seen upon it, poking away with a little stick at a little ball. I never saw it without thinking of a rhyme I had read or heard somewhere:

I was playing golf one day  
when the Germans landed.  
All our soldiers ran away,  
all our ships they stranded.  
And the thought of England's shame  
nearly put me off my game!

Never was there a word spoken in jest that so nearly came true!

Little do English people know the fate they were spared — for as I write I believe they have been spared the worst, though bad enough lies before them. In the early, apathetic, incomprehensible days of the war I once heard a small shopkeeper openly say that it did not interest him one way or the other. Our rulers did not seem to care much about it, so why should he? His life, his business, would go on much the same under Hitler.

How little they knew, people who thought like this. Our rulers, who did know or should have known, are the more to blame for letting the irretrievable calamity approach so near to us, tread even on our heels.

A little later, just before the collapse of France, the French Prime Minister, Reynaud, said that Paris would be defended to the last and that even if it should fall, even if the French Govern-

## SPOKEN IN JEST

ment were driven from France, the war would be carried on from the French Colonial Empire. That might, just conceivably, have been a practical proposition, as long as the British Empire remained behind France, though even then it would have been very difficult. In the event, Paris was not defended, and France capitulated.

But the same theory, in the case of England, was false. When the danger approached *our* shores, similar things were said. If England were invaded, we heard the war would be carried on from overseas, and the American Government, to quote one of its representatives, was told that the British Navy 'would never surrender and might in an extreme case be based on the American coasts'.

It is an illusion or a delusion. True, the British Navy might, in that dire event, have been used to defend Americans, but what solace would that have brought England, and how would the war have been carried on against Germany? By blockading, starving and bombing the captive millions in this island?

As long as England, this British island, survived, the war could be carried on, for this island is the head and heart of the Empire. Even if Africa or India or one of the Dominions, one of the limbs, were cut off, the fight could still go on as long as the head and heart remained intact. But cut off the head, pierce the heart — and were the limbs to continue fighting independently?

The survival of this island was indispensable and its subjugation would have been final.

But in those days at the end of May 1940 the words spoken in jest seemed about to come true. And if they had come true, worse things would have happened to golfers than being put off their game. The golf courses would have been closed. And what could be worse than that?



PART THREE

THE DEFENCE OF DULLMOUTH

'We have not, alas, an ally to befriend us.  
The time is ripe to extirpate and end us.  
Let the German touch hands with the Gaul,  
and the fortress of England must fall.'

SWINBURNE, 1886

When I read this in May, 1940, it seemed terrifyingly prophetic; rereading it in February, 1941, I still hope that Swinburne was wrong.

D. R.



## CHAPTER I

### DELIVERANCE

LISTENING to the German radio I heard the German announcer shout, in ranting, jubilant tones, 'The English are bottled up in Dunkirk. Our armies have surrounded them on all sides. They will not repeat their glorious runaway victory of Norway this time! We will not let a single rat escape!'

Sick with the thought of what was happening across the water, which still lay so quiet and peaceful in the sun, I turned off the radio and went out into the little lane, down the hill, to Dullmouth, which offered its placid everyday face to me: housewives bought their husband's supper, children played about the water, dogs lazily stretched themselves in the heat, and the flag, as usual, was at half-mast. This peculiarity of Dullmouth's flag had worried me for some time, because, with the thought of disaster so much in my mind, I feared it might portend great and evil tidings, but I later found that it was run down every time some citizen of local reputation died.

Yet, beneath that placid surface, Dullmouth was stirring. The dear old *Seagull*, that so long had ferried the quarter-mile to Kingswear and back, was gone, and when I asked, whither, I was told that she had gone on some grave mission. The *Seagull*, I thought! Little could I at that time imagine that comfortable old duck battling across the Channel to Dunkirk and back again, but so it was. Now I never tread her decks without giving her a silent salute. She is a veteran of Dunkirk! I think she should have an enormous medal hung on her bows, or fly an especial ensign, with every other craft, big or little, that was at Dunkirk. Every time I see her now I murmur to her '*Seagull*, you saved England, Britain, the little white house, me — everything, bless your heart' and I pat her sides.

Strange, how little feeling the English have for such things.

## THE DEFENCE OF DULLMOUTH

Every child ought to be brought up to recognize a ship that was at Dunkirk and revere her.

And farther on, the elderly owner of an elderly yacht, one of the relics of Dullmouth's great regatta days, was busily preparing his craft for a voyage. I did not then know, why. I heard afterwards that they went to him, he was a man over seventy, and asked him if he would go, and he was like to have fallen on his knees and thanked God for this unlooked-for chance of a great adventure, in his old age.

Here, around me, was England awakening to life again, and indeed Dullmouth, in wartime, as I shall tell, did come to life again. The warm blood of movement and energy coursed back into its hardening veins.

Morning, noon and night, I turned on the radio and listened, heavy with apprehension, for the news from Dunkirk. The German speaker raved and ranted and roared, exulted about the impending annihilation of the British army and fall of England — but he did not say that Dunkirk *had* been captured, that the British army *had* been annihilated or taken prisoner to a man. A day passed, and I heard, scarcely daring to believe, that we were still taking men off. Another day — and the same tidings. What on earth, I wondered. Was Hitler going to miss *this* chance? A third day came and went, on dragging footsteps, a fourth and a fifth, and still the tally of men taken off mounted.

Once more, when hope had seemed dead, I began to hope again. Then, on June the 4th, came Mr. Churchill's announcement. What Prime Minister in our history ever took office at such an emergency? Everything in ruins round him, it was like becoming managing director of a bankrupt concern.

'I have nothing to offer you but blood, toil, tears and sweat', I had heard him say in the radio, on May 13th, and my echoing voice had answered, 'You're right, you haven't'.

And then, at the end of May, he had prepared us for 'hard and heavy tidings', and I knew what that meant, too; it now seemed inevitable, to quote his own later words, that 'the whole root and core and brain of the British Army, on which and around which

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we were to build, and are to build, the great British Armies in the later years of the war, would perish on the field or be led into an ignominious and starving captivity'.

20,000 or 30,000 men, we might save, he had thought. I had wondered if we would save so many. And now on June the 4th, he rose to announce that nearly a thousand ships, of the Navy and the Merchant Marine, craft of all sort and shapes and sizes, had brought 'over 335,000 men, French and British, out of the jaws of death and shame'.

I do not believe in miracles, nor do I believe in that form of Christianity which sees the cure for all mistakes, not in human effort, but in praying to some supernatural power to make good the blunders committed on this earth; after all, those who hope to profit from those blunders are probably also praying to the same supernatural power that they shall benefit by them. I believe in human effort and energy and exertion. This was a miracle of human strength and exertion and devotion.

But there are aspects of it which are still unaccountable. Why did Hitler let this unique and unforeseeable opportunity slip through his hands? Why did he not massacre those marooned thousands on the beaches of Dunkirk, destroy those hundreds of little ships slowly moving in to take them off or carrying them away?

He had, at that time, by far the greatest air force in the world. To what end had he built it if not for this? Why did he not use it to the utmost? True, our air-fighters proved themselves and their machines better than our best hopes, but they were still very few. By weight of numbers even they could have been overborne. Hitler *had* the numbers. At the height of the struggle we had even to throw into it, as Mr. Churchill revealed, 'part of our main metropolitan fighter strength' — that is, *part of the last remnant of our fighting aircraft, held in reserve for the defence of this country against invasion*. We were living upon our last frail capital in the air. If Hitler had forced us to go on using up that reserve, England would have been open to him.

A great mystery hangs over those days at Dunkirk. 'Unfavour-



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able weather conditions for our aircraft,' blandly explained that German speaker who had savagely cried that 'not a rat will escape us'. But 'unfavourable weather' cannot explain the thing away.

I think there is another explanation, and that in it lies the reason why we are still alive and kicking to-day, that England as I write is still inviolate, that the future still lies before us, ours to make or mar. I think Hitler was looking two-ways-at-once, and thus overlooked the thing he should have seen.

It must be very difficult for a man, surfeited with cheap but most spectacular successes, a man who had never had any but weaklings and ignoramuses to deal with in all his political ventures (Hitler once said 'My misfortune is that I have always had nulls to do with', and in the long run this *may* indeed prove to have been his downfall, for it possibly made him too cocksure just at the moment when he needed to be most alert) it must be very difficult for such a man resolutely to turn his eyes from such a glittering prize as the cheap capture of Paris and the capitulation of France to an undertaking which, though infinitely more profitable in the end, did not beckon quite so obviously and was likely to be costlier in the short run.

I think this is what happened to Hitler. Paris beckoned. He, the man who had torn up every clause of the Versailles Treaty, one after another, who had reintroduced conscription and re-occupied the Rhineland and seized Austria and Czechoslovakia and smashed Poland and made Germany greater than she ever was before, now had the opportunity to go on to Paris and complete the process by making the French delegates swallow, in the very same railway coach, the very same words they had forced down the throats of the German delegates in 1918!

How great a triumph! Paris! PARIS! After a campaign of only a few weeks! Entry into that city on exactly the date foretold in Berlin — June 25! A pilgrimage, in mock homage, to the tomb of Napoleon — what a gesture! What a prospect, for the destitute neerdoweel from Vienna!

There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the turn, leads on to fortune. If you take it at the wrong turn it probably

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leads you on to misfortune. Hitler, I think, took the wrong turning in those last days of May 1940.

Some extraordinary pictures of him, taken when he received the news of the French capitulation, were issued in a German news-reel. Many people in this country will have seen them; they were reproduced in our illustrated press. They show the messenger from the front arriving at Hitler's headquarters with the news of the French request for an armistice. They show Hitler performing an extraordinary and extravagant dance of delight, miming the triumphal march down the road to Paris and the triumphal entry there. These are pictures of a man dazzled by the thought of coming into Paris as a conqueror, a man blinded by that success.

Hitler, I think, would have done better to keep a soberer head, and to keep his eye on the road to Dunkirk, not that to Paris. He lost the war, I think, at those crossroads.

It is impossible to believe that he could not have destroyed the British Army, in view of the desperate position it was in, or have prevented its embarkation, if he had flung his whole strength, in the air and on the land, against it. France could have waited; France was his, anyway; a fortnight or a month more or less would not have made much difference; he only had to shake the tree for that ripe plum to fall into his lap.

If he could have destroyed the British Army, have forced the British high command to send its last frail reserve of fighter aircraft across and have destroyed that, too, a victory without its like in the history of the world might have been his for the taking — for his dive-bombers could then have harassed our Navy enough to clear a way for the invasion.

It might have been? I think it might. But it was not. We were saved by something less than the breadth of a hair.

If we have no talent whatever for preparation, for the stitch-in-time, we seemingly have a genius for improvisation, for darning-the-hole, and — always given that mistake of Hitler — the rag-tag-and-bobtail armada which saved our armies at Dunkirk was the finest fruit that improvisation ever produced. As far as human minds and human arms can work miracles, this was a miracle.

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Or rather, it was one-fourth of a miracle; the other three-fourths were worked by the Navy, the hard-pressed, desperately outnumbered Air Force, engaged far from its home fields, and our oldest ally, the English Channel.

For England, the withered flower of hope revived once more, at the end of that first week in June. There still was a chance, and a good one, if we could man our coasts quickly enough.

Meanwhile, the men from Dunkirk poured back into the country tattered, weaponless, embittered, weary, angry. They had paid the bill which old men had been running up all these years, but when a clamour arose for these old men to be called to give account of their stewardship, it was drowned by the other elderly voices quavering, from the seats of the mighty, 'No recriminations'. In the House of Commons a Member back from Dunkirk, Captain Bellenger, appealed to the Speaker 'not to stifle views which are prevalent among those Members who have returned from overseas, but to give us the opportunity, not perhaps now, but on an appropriate occasion, to say what we have in our minds. If you are going to stifle debate, there is going to be trouble'.

Now here was the detestable idea that Ministers should be accountable for their actions, or inaction, poking its head up again. It needed to be stamped on, at once, and hard. Once more a representative of that working class which had sent so many hundreds of thousands of men to France, to Dunkirk, stepped into the breach. Mr. Thorne, of Plaistow, making a Point of Order, asked 'whether it is not advisable for men in uniform to be at their jobs as well as the people working in factory and workshops?' Captain Bellenger answered, 'They have been there'. Mr. Thorne succinctly replied, 'And so they should'. Said Captain Bellenger, 'You should go out'. Rejoined Mr. Thorne, 'I would if I were younger'.

So much for 'the heroes of Dunkirk' and for those who were responsible for their plight. This House had had too much to do with their misfortunes to wish to discuss them.

My heart was heavy again when I contemplated some of these men. Some were beyond question demoralized. They were

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scattered over the country far and wide, and much time would clearly be needed to get them organized in units again, to re-discipline them, to restore in them the faith in their leaders which soldiers must have and have a right to demand, the faith that had been so gravely betrayed. You saw them in ragged and dirty uniforms — and their khaki dress, even new, was about the worst thing that had ever been done to British soldiers, it made them feel slovenly and sartorially inferior to their comrades of the Navy and Air Force. Shoddy Brothers, or whoever designed this uniform, did the British Army a disservice.

I saw an officer, once, wearing a pair of red trousers with his khaki tunic; heaven knows whence he had them. I saw men wearing caps and berets with their uniform. They were unkempt, ill-cared for. They had left most of their weapons in France.

They were the 'heroes from Dunkirk', but England soon forgot these heroes, as quickly as it forgot those of the other war. They mooned listlessly about the railway stations, because there was no place for them to rest. They had scarcely any money, and had to watch their Australian and Canadian brothers-in-arms freely spending the ample pay they received. (No wonder the Australians fought so magnificently in Libya, as they fought everywhere in the 1914-18 war; they were not made to feel they were nobody's friends.)

I was disconsolate when I looked at these soldiers. I never saw British soldiers in such poor heart or shape in the other war, neither after the retreat from Mons in 1914, nor during that of 1918. I sympathized with them, deeply; I knew who was to blame, and it was not they. But I saw that much time would be needed to get them fit and disciplined and into fighting fettle again.

Would we have so much time? Surely Hitler would not let us get our wind? Our armies were home, true, but they were far from ready to fight. In guns, tanks and mechanized transport we had lost in France 'the best of all we had to give', in Mr. Churchill's words. The army in France 'had had the first-fruits of all that our industry had to give and that was gone,' in Mr. Churchill's words. Our coasts were open and undefended. Weeks and months

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would be needed to build and man defences, to arm the troops, to build new guns and new tanks and new aeroplanes. Could we possibly hope for so much time, before the blow came?

It seemed too much, far too much, to hope for. I still had little hope, as I waited in the little white house. But still, the army had been saved, June was dragging on, Hitler would still need a few weeks to complete his triumphs in France. Every day that passed was a day gained.

So a tiny hope was reborn.

## CHAPTER 2

### WORTH A MASS?

PARIS, somebody once said in making his political calculations, was worth a mass. Hitler thought it worth letting the British Army escape him at Dunkirk. Mussolini thought its capture made his entry into the war on Hitler's side worth while. Both were wrong.

By the beginning of June 1940 the fall of Paris and the capitulation of France were clear to foresee. Only the heart, which hoped against hope, could still deny this; the head knew it, or at any rate, mine did. There was an irresistible force in the German onslaught, a lack of vigour in the French resistance, which made it certain. I knew that we should be left to fight Germany alone, and still thought we could win if we defended our island and defeated the invasion. Once that was gone, all the talk about carrying on the war from overseas was, I thought, wind.

But Mussolini's entry into the war did surprise me. True, I had none of the illusions of Mr. Chamberlain who, inevitably, had declared six months before, 'The Italian genius has developed in the characteristic Fascist institution a high authoritarian regime which, however, threatens neither religious nor economic freedom nor the security of other nations'. How on earth were Englishmen, or anybody else, to know what the war was about, what were 'the things we are fighting for', while the British Prime Minister continued to talk like that about the aggressor who had by force of arms conquered Abyssinia and Albania and helped to overthrow a democratically elected government in Spain? It was appalling, this incorrigible insincerity and ignobility of thought which the utterances of our leaders so repeatedly revealed.

I would rather have been struck dumb than uttered such twaddle about the Italian regime from which Hitler had copied so much of his method.

But for all that, I was surprised by Mussolini's entry into the

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war. Not that I had any but the lowest opinion of his honesty or morals. He had betrayed every friend he ever had, and every promise he ever made, just like Hitler.

But I credited him with shrewdness. I thought he would see that his best card was to stay out of the war, and then, with a big army, navy and air force, to play a strong part at the Peace Conference, where, as the Prince of Peace, he would have secured a little more territory. By staying out of the war, he could *not* lose. By coming in, he *might*.

Of the two alternatives, the first was clearly the better. If he ever had any doubts about that, I thought, they must have disappeared when the British Navy chased and caught and destroyed the German pocket battleship, *Graf Spee*, off Montevideo. From that moment he should have known that Italy, a sea-surrounded power, would feel the strangling effect of British sea-power if ever he came into the war against us. Far better, from the point of view of a quite unprincipled gangster, as I thought him to be, to stay out, derive prosperity from the supply of war materials to Germany (for the good Mr. Chamberlain would never impose the blockade on that 'high authoritarian regime' which he so much admired), and cash in at the peace.

As I write events are going to prove that this view was right. Mussolini is a finished man.

But the word 'Paris' seemingly blinded him, as its flashing glitter had diverted Hitler's gaze from Dunkirk. The imminent prospect of its fall and the capitulation of France dazzled him, too. On June 10th he 'plunged the dagger' into the back of already prostrate France.

Italy's entry into the war seemed, at the time, grave enough. We already had enough on our hands. We were about to lose the French Navy, probably, and now the Italian Navy would be against us. Still, I could not bring myself to bother overmuch, at that time, about one disaster more or less. I only cursed a little more about our politicians, who for years had been fawning on and flattering this stiletto-man and helping him to his cheap successes, one after another, and would now begin to call him anti-

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Christ and the Top Wop and all the rest. For the rest I recalled what Field-Marshal von Blomberg, Hitler's erstwhile War Minister, had once said to a friend of mine: 'The side that has Italy's help will lose the next war'; and sought to derive comfort from that, for it was said just after he had been to Italy and thus seemed likely to be sound.

Towards the end of June, when it was clear that events were triumphantly to fulfil the loathsome German broadcaster's promise that the Germans would be in Paris by June 25, I came to London, again, to look round. Once more I found that superb weather that seemed to mock the things that were happening. The town stifled in the heat. On the day that France collapsed I went to a theatre. A comedian with a nondescript foreign accent played the part of Hitler in a sketch which made of that man a lavatory attendant in search of a job! What humour — on such a day as this. A polka was played, on the stage, and the actresses came down among the audience in search of partners to dance it, there in the auditorium. On such a day as this! It was revolting. The band played the 'Marseillaise'. It was like strolling players mocking a funeral. I came away, thinking of the lovely Paris I had seen but a few brief weeks before.

In England the usual clamour went up — that Marshal Pétain and his men were traitors, who had let us down and sold the country, and the like. It is nonsense. France *had* been betrayed and let down and sold — yes, a thousand times yes! But not only by the men who stepped in at the last moment to try and save something from the wreck. France was betrayed by men who have their counterparts in this country, men who had first lulled their country to sleep for years and had then extorted money from it for rearmament — but had not re-armed!

The millions had gone, but where were the arms? The Maginot Line was a hoax, the French Air Force scarcely existed. Not the men who made the peace, but the men who went before brought this about. Their names are Léon Blum, Pierre Cot, Daladier, Laval, Bonnet and many more, and over a million Frenchmen, prisoners-of-war as I write, are paying the price.



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The men who took over the heap of ruins — as Mr. Churchill took over what was almost a heap of ruins in England — were at this disadvantage, as compared with him: there was no Channel between Germany and France, no chance of a breathing space, the enemy was at the gates. They had but the choice between fighting on for a few days, at enormous cost in French life and at the price of the occupation of the *whole* of their country, or of saving a large piece of it from the enemy's hands and of using the French Colonial Armies and the French Navy as a bargaining instrument to ensure his continued forbearance.

'France was hoist with her own Pétain'? This is boloney. Marshal Pétain saved what he could and I doubt if very many Frenchmen could be found in France to-day to criticize him. But very many Frenchmen in France, and the more than a million Frenchmen in captivity want passionately and bitterly to know the history of those years before the war began, what happened to the money, what happened to the arms. *That* is the question that ought to be thrashed out in France, and in this country, and none other, and do not be hoodwinked. When the question is raised in England, the answer is always 'No recriminations'. When it is raised about France, the answer is 'Marshal Pétain sold his country and let us down'.

As far as I can see, the principle of non-accountability has become so firmly established that no answer ever will be returned to those gigantic questions, behind which are such dark abysses to be explored. If this is so, I can see no reason why wars should ever cease. The reasons for this war lie in them.

I seldom knew so lovely a night in London as that of the 25th of June, when France collapsed. France gone, Italy against us, I thought, as I walked along Piccadilly, admiring the clear and starry sky, our coasts unmanned, our armies still disorganized, our airmen overworked and outnumbered, the country still wide open for parachutists — what a prospect.

I knew, quite certainly, that the invasion of England was the darling aim and hope of the Germans, that everything they had done and won was null and void and meaningless if this were not

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achieved, because failure to invade, or an unsuccessful invasion, were in the long run, implacably and remorselessly, defeat — total defeat and collapse. There was no halfway house.

And that being so, they would have to strike *now*, I thought. There would never be another opportunity like this, they could hardly ever have hoped for so early and favourable an opportunity as this. I expected every time I switched on the radio to hear the news. I went back to Devon and watched the sea, with a horrified fascination.

## CHAPTER 3

### OPEN BEACHES

EXPECTING every night, when I went to bed, to hear in the morning, and every morning, when I got up, to hear in the evening that the invasion had begun, I resumed my life in the little white house.

I had entirely stopped trying to write anything; who could write, until he knew the answer to the great question that the future held? For that matter, there seemed no point in writing, for it was becoming less possible than ever to inform the public.

Early in 1940 one newspaper had suggested that I should write an article setting out the things that ought to be done if we were to win the war. I had suggested, among other things, that the rate of the call-up was too slow; that our war-production was very much too slow and that it was fantastic to have two million unemployed in a country which desperately needed men to make arms; that our diplomacy was not going the right way to achieve what should be its vital and paramount aim — to keep Italy and Russia out of the war; that our radio propaganda for the Germans was as maladroit as it could be; that we must hasten the defence of our coasts; that we must urgently fill the gap in the Maginot Line; that we must above all accelerate the rate of growth of our Air Force.

The paper refused to print this article on the ground that it was 'not constructive enough', and when I asked for an example of a 'constructive' suggestion, said 'Well, for instance, the bombing of the Russian oil wells at Batum'.

As I thought at that time, and still think, that the provocation of Russia to enter the war on Hitler's side was the one major stupidity we had not committed, I refused and for the time did not exert myself to write anything. It seemed too futile.

The days dragged on, June slowly grew older, and no invasion

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came. Still there was, in all our darkness, that one bright gleam of light — the performance of the Royal Air Force wherever it met the German airmen. The young men who led the Air Force, at least, knew just what they were about and it may prove that they did more than anybody else to save England in that most discontented of summers.

The decision, taken before the war, to equip our small force of fighter aircraft with machines carrying eight machine guns, the excellence of design, the high quality of the pilots, and the excellence of the ground staff may just have turned the scale and have caused the invasion to be delayed and delayed and again delayed — who knows?

Passchendaele, the Somme, and Dunkirk lay heavy as gall on the stomach of the Army; even the Navy had had its bad shocks, at Scapa Flow and elsewhere; but the Air Force seemed completely atop of its job. The excellence of the advice its leaders, young men (Nelson was 47 when he destroyed the French Fleet at Trafalgar, Wellington 46 when he routed the French at Waterloo, Pitt 46 when he led England to victory, but that lesson seemed to have been completely forgotten in the England of 1918-39) gave the Cabinet was revealed in Mr. Churchill's statement on June 18th that, during the battle in France 'in spite of every kind of pressure we never would allow the entire metropolitan strength of the Air Force, in fighters, to be consumed . . . Our fighter Air Force might easily have been exhausted as a mere accident in that great struggle and we should have found ourselves at the present time in a very serious plight. But . . . our fighter air strength is stronger at the present time, relatively to the Germans who have suffered terrible losses, than it has ever been, and consequently we believe ourselves to possess the capacity to continue the war in the air under better conditions than we have ever experienced before. I look forward confidently to the exploits of our fighter pilots, who will have the glory of saving their native land, their island home, and all they love, from the most deadly of all attacks.'

Inspiring and prophetic words, for that last ounce of reserve

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strength, of superior quality, of cool and clear-headed counsel, which the Air Force brought forth in the summer of 1940, saved us, together with the British Channel, still a tough foe, and the Navy. We could not know it then, but even then those daily reports of the victories won in the air by the British air fighters were the one solace and source of hope.

Sometimes in my travels about England, I walked along the cliffs and beaches. It was a hair-raising scene of peace and quiet, in those times of imminent and mortal danger. You could walk for miles without seeing a soul.

For instance, one day in the east of England I saw a very long stretch of smooth, firm sand — nearly eight miles of it. The sand sloped gradually to the sea, but steeply when it reached the water's edge. A battleship could have moored within a stone-throw of the shore.

It was an ideal place for the landing of troops, either by ship or from submarines, or troop-carrying flying-boats, which could have alighted either on the always-placid sea or on the lake a hundred yards inland. At the back of the stretch of sand ran a perfectly straight, flat road — ideal for the landing of troop-carrying aeroplanes. The place might have been especially prepared for landings. A lonely inn, with a garage, stood in the middle; its petrol stocks would have been welcome to any landing force.

Many months later, when I went to lecture to the lonely troops stationed there, the place bristled with every kind of defensive obstacle — wire, mines, mortars, machine guns, artillery, and all the rest. But in those summer days, when the invasion seemed bound to come at any moment, it was rare to encounter a human being there. You could not find a boy with a pea-shooter, far less a man with a gun, and that continued for weeks and months.

The newspapers and the radio had much to say about the great defensive preparations that were being made on the east coast; here, was nothing. Were we about to repeat the old mistake of locking, bolting and barring the front door and leaving the back door wide open? The Germans seemed most likely, if they came, to descend on Ireland first and strike from there. I wrote frantic

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letters to every influential person I could think of, to draw attention to this ghastly gap, for I knew it was but one of scores on those lonely and open coasts.

As I walked those deserted sands, during June and July days of 1940, the level and motionless sea looked to me more like a prison wall than the emblem and symbol of an Englishman's freedom. It was gruesome to go there.

## CHAPTER 4

### DE PIRE À PIRE

DURING the darkest period of that grisly and sultry summer of 1940, desperate to get behind a gun of some sort, I tried, among other things, to enter the Navy, having heard, from a jovial petty officer in Charing Cross Road, that a service existed called the Defensively Armed Merchant Shipping Service, which took men, to be trained as seaman-gunners, up to the age of 45, which was my age.

I rushed off to Plymouth, found the enlistment office, waited for hours among a crowd of young conscripts who wished to serve afloat, ran the gauntlet of the innumerable doctors, passed fit — and heard a few days later that the age limit had been put back to forty years. Enormous influence was needed at that time to get into the war and I saw at once that no man under the rank of a peer of the realm would be able to help me, so I went to London to find one.

So it came about that, on a day when our plight was still very grave, though the mortal danger was slightly dwindling, I found myself, for the second time in my life, a spectator of the proceedings of the House of Lords, and I was able once more to observe the admirable equanimity in a shaken and stricken world, of that strange assembly, of whose 784 members about 100, I dare say, were present on this day.

For a little while I waited in the lobby outside the Chamber for the session to begin. Elderly gentlemen, somewhat vitiated in their appearance, from overmuch sojourning in the rarefied atmosphere of clubs, approached, a little stiff in their gait, and as they came they took hats from their heads with one hand and held out umbrellas with the other. Uniformed servants tottered towards them, took those treasures from them, and bore them reverently to hooks, labelled with the names of earls and

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viscounts. They seemed to murmur that Black Rod, or somebody, had not yet come in, or had not yet gone out, I know not what.

Presently I went in. On one side of the Chamber sat a few dozen Tory peers. On the other side sat perhaps two or three dozen Opposition peers — the Liberal peers, or Bigwhigs, and the Labour peers — for, believe it or not, there are Labour peers in this assembly. They may neither toil nor spin, but they were arrayed in the same sombre garments as those opposite them.

The Labour peers do not, when the fury of debate subsides in that place, go home to Limehouse, take off their coats, roll up their sleeves, put on their slippers, and assail a good steak-and-onions prepared by Mother. Indeed, the only difference between them and the peers opposite seems to be that they occupy different sides of that House when they are in it; for outside it they belong to the same clubs, go to the same functions, have the same circle of acquaintances, and many of them even in their youth attended the same schools, which are as unknown as Mecca itself to any labouring man.

I felt myself a little alien in that place. The only other visitor was a man whom I judged from his appearance to be Jewish and from his speech to be foreign, for his English was primitive. He seemed, however, to feel more at home there, for while I was waiting in the lobby I had noticed him approach two or three peers and, in his broken English, put deferential questions to them about this and that. I deduced that he must be a journalist, that the honey he gathered here would presently be offered to the readers of the English-speaking press.

Sir John (I crave your indulgence and pardon, I am behind the times) Lord Simon appeared, at least, I judged that it was he beneath that great wig and inside that black gown, and the peers rose, he bowed to them and they to him, and he seated himself, there was an introductory exchange of compliments between noble viscount and noble viscount, in which I gathered that our relations with the Poles played some part, and then a murmur of debate rose like faint incense into the air.



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After listening awhile I learned that it concerned a gasometer in Newcastle-on-Tyne. Just what that gasometer had done, why it was important to our cause, I could not understand, though I listened long, but its formidable bulk loomed large and heavy over the House of Lords and the debate was fierce; passions were so stirred that you could occasionally hear a word. There was very nearly acrimony, there was almost acerbity, there were little pointed digs here and proud, wounded smiles there.

My patriotism, however, was assuaged and reassured when I remarked that this debate was not just another class-against-class wrangle, that it was not a feud between the Slaves of the Gasometer, represented by the Labour Peers, and the Proprietors of the Gasometer, represented by Lord Gasworks and the other Tory peers. For the Bigwhigs and the Labour peers seemed to take but the most languid interest in the gasometer. The quarrel about it, whatever it was, was between Big Tories, between peers on the same Government side of the House.

Whatever the gasometer had done, I perceived that it had long sown dissension in those Tory ranks. For this culprit gasometer had already been before A Committee Of The House, in some quiet committee-room of the Upper Chamber its misdeeds had been long and gravely considered and discussed, there had been argument and counter-argument, accusation and counter-accusation, there had been Findings and A Report.

The innermost secrets of that gasometer had been wrested from it and exposed. The dispute now, as far as I could glean, was between a peer who most strongly felt that all had not been as it should have been in the Proceedings of that Committee, and other peers, who had served on the Committee, and who felt equally strongly that they had done their uttermost duty by the gasometer and the country.

Who knows? It was clearly an issue of some importance and I did not understand it well enough to give my sympathies to either side. I left them thrusting and parrying and came away, into the hot and sunbaked streets, looked up into the cloudless blue sky, where the silver balloons placidly browsed; somehow,

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they looked to me like members of the House of Lords. I walked up Whitehall, wondering about that gasometer, what it had done, whether it had been built, whether it was now to be dismantled. . . .

A newspaper headline called to me, 'Hitler's Preparations for Invasion'.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE REFUGEES

DULLMOUTH harbour, in peacetime, depressed by its deadness. There was the lovely river basin and the lovely setting of wooded hills and the gateway leading to the open sea beyond. It only needed the busy coming and going of ships and throngs of seamen on the quay and little cafés with striped blinds and terraces to make it, like Dieppe or many another little foreign port, as lively as it was lovely, to make it a real town instead of a picture postcard.

But just those things lacked — in peacetime. The river lay empty and lifeless, save for the brief and artificial animation that the annual regatta gave it, and seldom saw a ship; the *Seagull*, plying to and fro, was at most times the only sign of life on it. The once vigorous town had become, like so many other English towns, a tea-and-visitors-settlement. A few yachtsmen — yes. Mariners — no.

With the coming of war life crept back into the picture of Dullmouth, like the colour returning to the cheeks of a woman reviving from a swoon. Now and then a destroyer or a submarine put in, and the moribund harbour immediately became alive. Great cargo ships came to coal, their sides gay with the great flags painted on them to show their nationality.

Suddenly, one morning, a German aeroplane dropped through the clouds above the little town and a moment later a British fighter appeared and gave battle. There was a brief encounter and then one of the two — unfortunately in this case it was the Britisher — fell in a great arc of smoke into the sea; a launch sped out from Dullmouth and a few minutes later the pilot was being helped ashore, smiling, cool, and doing the thumbs-up. Another time a German appeared just as a destroyer in the

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harbour was weighing anchor; she moved down toward the sea with her guns flashing and barking, a thrilling sight.

Then, just before Dunkirk, the refugees began to appear — foreign fishermen with their trawlers, in twos and threes and fours, until the river was packed with them as they lay, moored side by side, as far as the eye could see. Their rust-brown sails and green hulls cheered the lorn river, which merrily reflected them as it ran to the sea and seemed happy that it had work to do again; it was bored with yachts and trippers.

Now the quays and the little square and the narrow streets came to life, too, as those hundreds of seamen rolled along in their great seaboots and voluminous blouses, chatting hoarsely and volubly. The old houses yawned, blinked, stretched themselves and opened their eyes; were Drake's men back again, they thought, as they listened to the unwonted bustle and watched this unaccustomed activity?

But Dullmouth's first refugees were neither boon nor blessing. They were truculent, noisy fellows, who when a few days had passed had virtually occupied the town. Their bearing was not that of men grateful for the asylum they found. Rather did they appear discontented and quarrelsome.

I began to look at them with something more than curiosity, almost with suspicion. I listened to them talking and discovered that most of them belonged to a foreign community on which Hitler had particularly lavished his subversive efforts.

I could understand enough of what I heard them say to realize that they were by no means enthusiastic about the country they had come to. They were lusty great men, most of them, and the trawler captains often did not know just whom they had brought: when they sailed away from their native shores fugitives, unknown to them, just jumped their craft in dozens.

Now, a few weeks before this time Hitler had conquered Norway, very largely through the device of sending innocent-looking cargo ships into Norwegian ports with German soldiers in their holds. There were several hundreds of these red-bloused seamen, of pugnacious mien, and Dullmouth, which had but

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three or four policemen, and they seldom had any crime to handle in that friendly town in normal times, was to all effect in their hands.

Just who and what were they, and what was their allegiance? When Dunkirk came most of them flatly refused to go across and help save the British Army, or any Belgians or Frenchmen who wanted to get away. They swarmed about the streets of Dullmouth, monopolized the inns, were frequently drunk, and seemed to have money enough.

Things came to such a pass that policemen from other towns were drafted to Dullmouth, and Dullmouth's special constables put on their peaked caps and duty-armlets and stood meaningly about. For my part, with the thought of Narvik in my mind, and invasion threatening, I did not at all like the look of these men, and spent much energy in informing the authorities, local and in London, about them. Dullmouth might virtually have been in foreign occupation, and the good people of the town, the most friendly I ever encountered in England, became restive.

At last an emissary from their Embassy came down, accompanied by a uniformed gendarme, and harangued those loutish men in the Guildhall. Presently a detachment of British sailors was sent along from Plymouth, and stood guard on the quayside, while the seamen were confined to their trawlers, moored in the stream. And then, one day, they were gone, none knew quite where, but Dullmouth breathed again.

This first taste of allies left a bad taste in Dullmouth's mouth and when they had gone the river seemed like to relapse into its previous state, when it spent all its time dreaming of bygone glories. But soon other newcomers appeared. Our own destroyers were always in and out and from time to time a neutral ship appeared.

And then came the seamen of other foreign nations, and the remnant of their shipping — the Free Frenchmen, Hollanders, and Poles. Dullmouth livened again. The little square had not seen so many people at all times of the day for very many years. The river chuckled to be at work again so soon. Even the little ship-

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yards, which had grown listless from overmuch scraping of the bottoms of yachts, awoke and sang a cheerful song of hammering and riveting.

The Frenchmen never quite made themselves beloved. Although they sympathized with de Gaulle in his fight for the liberation of France, they still had in them something of the apathy and cynicism which the between-war years bred in so many Frenchmen. Frenchmen I know, though their first and last thought is for France to be rid of the pestilent Germans, sometimes grow irritable when they hear men speak of that France of 1918-39 as 'a democracy'. There was unlimited licence, they say, but how much freedom? Freedom for politicians of shameful venality and corruption, they claim, was abundant enough, but there was little freedom for honest men. They think, many of them, of that France as the negation of democracy. English people should understand their feeling.

The Hollanders understood the people of Dullmouth, and these understood and respected the Hollanders.

But the outstanding success of the war in Dullmouth was scored by the Poles, who, in their little ships, never shirked the most arduous tasks nor the most wearisome drudgery, and in their looks and bearing vied with, if they did not sometimes even surpass, our own seamen.

This was and is, for me, one of the most remarkable revelations of the war. In the years after the Armistice and before the coming of Hitler the Germans directed their most venomous propaganda against the Poles, whom they painted as corrupt, dirty, lazy, inefficient and incapable of running their own State. For a few years after Hitler's advent, when that man was successfully pursuing his policy of lulling-to-sleep the one group of potential victims while he finished with another, this German campaign against Poland was suspended. It was then re-opened and launched with greater force than ever after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and culminated in the attack on Poland.

A little mud always sticks, and I remember only too well, from my years in Berlin, how successful the Germans were in

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this campaign of defamation, especially among influential people in England who themselves knew nothing of Poland. I knew how mendacious it was, but must myself confess to being surprised, in the most favourable way, by the Poles when I encountered them in England. And from all I hear my impression is universally shared.

One of the most difficult things in this world is, when your country has been defeated and overrun and devastated, when all hope seems dead, to save enough of your men to reform an army abroad, and then to reorganize that force, in a foreign land, and make of it a first-rate fighting instrument, disciplined, pugnacious and keen.

Everywhere I went in England, the Poles had won the respect and admiration of the people. In looks, physique, bearing and discipline they were the equal of any troops I have ever seen, and better than most. I hope the people of this country will remember them, after this war, if some new campaign of vilification is started, for the especial interest of some third party on plunder bent.

I myself, when I was in Poland, did not credit them with the qualities they showed in exile, but I think they were unfortunate, as most other countries seem to have been in those appalling between-war years, in the Governments they had. They knew, as certainly as all other neighbour-countries of Germany, from 1933 onward, that the Germans would soon be at them again, and their Governments contributed to the weakening of the strength of the great front which could have been raised against that predatory Germany by the miserable dispute with the Czechoslovaks about the little Teschen region. The Czechs, for that matter, were just as unyielding.

The Polish Governments of the 1933-39 era were regrettably like the British Governments of the same period.

But the Poles who reorganized their armies, first in France, and then in Britain, after indescribable ordeals, staked a lasting claim to nationhood and to the respect of all who knew them.

In Dullmouth all the coming and going of foreign merchant ships and seamen contributed much to the enlivening of the

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scene. I was often perplexed by the thought that a war was seemingly needed to give animation to so lovely a picture, which in peacetime so obviously needed animating. Now that ships came and went, and British and foreign sailors rolled about, the little town was brisk and invigorating. Footsteps always rang through the oversleepy streets, the river with new vigour and interest sought the sea, affectionately lapping the sides of the strange craft that lay in it as it went, the old houses, which long had leaned against each other in the noonday nap of age, stood up and took notice. Only one thing was still needed — the children.

One day, as if some invisible Pied Piper led them, there was a clattering and pattering of many small feet, and they came.



## CHAPTER 6

### SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

FROM a window over the square we watched them troop ashore from the *Seagull* in hundreds, the children from the London slums, wearing big labels, carrying bundles, some laughing, some crying, some wondering, holding each other's hands, looking about them, expectant, confused, fearful.

It was a blazingly hot July day and they had travelled, in their packed trains, from early morning till mid-afternoon. They were the 'evacuees', if I must use the awful word that was coined for them. (Early in the war I saw a newspaper placard in London which shouted at me 'Compulsory Evacuation Coming!' Ah, well, I thought, it was bound to come; 'Forcible Feeding' is already part of our civilization.)

Organization is not Dullmouth's strong point and although legions of ladies wearing large paper medals with the word 'Helper' flocked about the children, although I, who then had a car, had been asked to attend with it and waited vainly for a long time for somebody to carry, many hours passed before, in a schoolroom, we found the miserable remnant of the Pied Piper's flock and chose from it the three little girls who were to sleep in Brenda Mary's room.

One of them was a demure and self-possessed little miss, the daughter of better-class working people. The two others were sisters and came from some of the worst slums in London, near the Old Kent Road, which later was badly bombed. They were utterly miserable and sat huddled together, with tear-stained faces. They pined already for the streets and alleyways. When you spoke to them you had to put your ear to their lips to hear the answer. They had already been 'evacuated' once, as we subsequently learned, and had cried themselves home again. They hated this.

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Even I, eager for this experiment, was dubious about taking these two, and their schoolmaster, noticing that we had them, gave me the compassionate look that meant, 'You little know what you are in for'. Of all those children, they were likely to be the most implacably resistant to efforts to make them healthy and happy. The slums were engrained in their bodies and minds, like dirt under a fingernail. Afterwards we took a fourth and ailing child, who for the first ten days dirtied her bed every night.

They were most unhappy children, when we got them to the little white house, at any rate the two sisters were. They felt they had been wrenched from their home and parents, against their will, and pitchforked into an unfriendly world, full of people who hated them and wanted to harass them and make them do all the things they detested.

Fear and suspicion were in their eyes — the world they had been born into had put them there. They sat, forlorn and tearful and resentful, and their wet eyes followed us spitefully about. They would not speak, unless they were forced, and then in whispers, and if they could they would lie. They would not eat good food and when they were asked what they liked said, almost inaudibly, 'Corned beef'. One of them cried when she was given coffee to drink but, with memories of my own boyhood in my mind, I thought I knew why, so she was told she could not have anything else and eventually drank some. From that day on she loved coffee — because it *was* coffee. The stuff she had had to drink as coffee was that foul-tasting 'essence' mixed with water, which I so well remembered.

The development of these children was, I think, the greatest single happiness and satisfaction I ever experienced in my life. Six months later they were the happiest and healthiest and merriest children you could have found anywhere, loving, thoughtful, and busy. It was as if dandelions had bloomed into daffodils. They loved every moment of their lives and only cried when I went to London — they were afraid for me among the bombs, though they had forgotten to be frightened of bombs themselves. When they first came they were sub-human. Morons

## THE DEFENCE OF DULLMOUTH

had taught them to shriek and run about and cower and go as white as chalk whenever they heard the sirens.

They vindicated the most violent of my hatreds — hatred of our slums — and proved the most dearly-held of my theories — that these slums, and the creatures they produce, are a running sore on the body of England that could be cured by the most elementary use of human understanding.

For a patriot of my creed, who thinks of the nation as a community and not as a collection of mutually-antagonistic classes, the children of the nation are the first charge upon it — and the children of all classes, without distinction. I never wanted to take away his little Eton jacket and little top hat, his prenatal membership of White's and the House of Lords, from little Lord Fauntleroy. Let him have them, for who wants them?

But a nation is not a nation that allows millions of its children to grow up in the conditions that prevail in the British slums, and as long as they exist such words as 'democracy' and 'freedom' are a mockery. They should, at least, have the opportunity of health, and light and air, of casting off the stigma and inbred feeling of inferiority which childhood in such places leaves in them.

But all organized effort to get this first and self-evident tenet of patriotism universally accepted in England has in the past been killed by the relatively small group of better-off ones vindictively shouting 'If you give 'em a bath they put coals in it'. The answer to which is, 'Make it a punishable offence to put coals in the bath'.

When the war approached I saw that, for all its beastliness, two good things might come of it, if only the mind of England would awake. The first was the revival of British agriculture and the decaying British countryside. The farmers, once again, in this war as in the last, would be encouraged and even driven to grow more food. As soon as the last war finished, the farmers were forgotten, and in those terrible between-war years agriculture and the countryside fell back into a worse state than they had ever known. After this war, perhaps, who knew, if only patriots could at last come to power, that would be prevented from happening again.

## SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

The second hope which the war clearly offered, as it approached, was the clearance of the slums (for Hitler was obviously going to destroy much of them) and the regeneration of the children bred in them. It was sad and bad enough that we should have to wait for a war to give us the opportunity; but undeniably it *would* provide that opportunity, and I, for one, hoped against hope that it would be taken, for if these two things were achieved, even the two world wars would have been worth while.

We are in the midst of the war of 1939-19something. No man or woman who goes about this country with open eyes can have overlooked the difference between our own soldiers and those from the Dominions, from Australia, from Canada, from New Zealand, from South Africa. If they have overlooked it, let them look about them, or study the illustrated press.

Let them study the lessons of such exploits as that of Bardia, where the Australians captured or killed over 40,000 Italians, when our cause most direly needed the invigoration of a success, at a cost of some 600 casualties. Let them remember that the Australians and Canadians and other Dominions troops were similarly foremost, as fighting men, in the last war. Let them compare those faces from the Dominions with the faces of our own men, bearing against bearing, physique against physique. The spirits and the looks, the body and the mind, of Old England have gone to the Dominions. In those faces you will see keenness, self-esteem, vigour, superiority. In these you will see repression, under-nutrition, under-enlightenment, apathy.

These are the direct results of the decay of the British countryside and the British slums.

It was so in the last war. It is so in this. Is it to be so in some other war in twenty more years time? We shall not always survive if we do not cure these things.

Does anybody challenge me? We are in the war of 1939-19something. Read this, that a great writer, C. E. Montague, now dead, said about the war of 1914-18:

You might survey from beginning to end a British attack up a bare opposite slope, perhaps with British troops on the

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left and Canadian or Australian troops on the right. You had already seen them meet on roads in the rear: battalions of colourless, stunted, half-toothless lads from hot, humid Lancashire mills; battalions of slow, staring faces, gargoyles out of the tragical-comical-historical-pastoral edifice of modern English rural life; Dominion battalions of men startlingly taller, stronger, handsomer, prouder, firmer in nerve, better schooled, more boldly interested in life, quicker to take means to an end and to parry and counter any new blow of circumstance, men who had learned already to look at our men with the half-curious, half-pitying look of a higher, happier caste at a lower. And now you saw them, all these kinds, arise in one continuous line out of the earth and walk forward to bear in the riddled flesh and wrung spirit the sins of their several fathers, pastors and masters.

Time after time there would come to the watching eye, to the mind still desperately hugging the hope that known causes might not bring their normal effects, the same crushing demonstration that things are as we have made them. Sometimes the line of home troops would break into gaps and bunches, lose touch and direction and common purpose, some of the knots plunging on into the back of our barrage or feasting some enemy machine gunner on their density, others straggling back to the place whence they had started, while the Dominion troops still ambled steadily on, their line delicately waving but always continuous, closing again, as living flesh closes over a pinprick, wherever an enemy shell tore a hole.

Perhaps the undersized boys from our slums and the underwitted boys from the 'agricultural, residential and sporting estates' of our auctioneers' advertisements would get to their goal, the spirit wresting prodigies of valour out of the wronged flesh, hold on there for an hour or two with the shells splashing the earth up about them like puddle water when great raindrops make its surface jump, and then fall back under orders, without any need, the brain of our army failing to know how to use what its muscle had won. Then, while you saw the triumphant Australians throw back a protective flank from the left of their newly-won front to the

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English right, far in the rear, you knew bitterly what the Australians were saying once more: 'They've let us down again!' 'Another Tommy officer who didn't know he'd won!' As if it were the fault, that day, of anyone there! Our men could only draw on such funds of nerve and physique, knowledge and skill, as we had put into the bank for them. Not they, but their rulers and 'betters', had lost their heads in the joy of making money fast out of steam, and so made half of our nation slum-dwellers. It was not they who had moulded English rustic life to keep up the complacency of sentimental modern imitators of feudal barons. It was not they who had made our Regular Army neither aristocratic, with the virtues of aristocracy, nor democratic, with the different virtues of democracy, nor keenly professional, with the professional virtues of gusto and curiosity about the possibilities of its work. Like the syphilitic children of some jolly Victorian rake, they could only bring to this harsh examination such health and sanity as all the pleasant vices of Victorian and Edwardian England had left them.<sup>1</sup>

Thus C. E. Montague, writing about twenty-five years ago!

Words terribly true of the 1914-18 war, terrifyingly prophetic of the war of 1939-19something.

That these things can be cured, I proved, in my small way. They do not need to be; they are easily cured, and the curing of them would invigorate and renew the whole country, kill the blight that has lain across it for so long.

Only the class-against-class mania of this country, the terror of the higher-ups that the betterment of the lot of the lower-downs would somehow deprive them of something which none wishes to take from them, prevents them from being cured. And yet these class distinctions in England are no longer class distinctions at all, they are just money-distinctions, income-categories. The *classes* have become inextricably mixed, and the aristocracy is as defunct as the peasantry. There is only a moneyed class, which derives its money from jam, sausages, soap or whatnot

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Messrs. Chatto and Windus for permission to quote this extract from *Disenchantment*, by C. E. Montague.

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and in its stately homes apes the manner of the extinct aristocracy, a less-moneyed middle class, and an unmoneyed working class, which consumes most of the jam, sausages, soap and whatnot, and all these classes, whose only real difference is that which can be expressed in cash, seem to be mutually and vindictively antagonistic.

All these money-groups (*not* classes) would clearly benefit, since they are inter-dependent, from the betterment of the now intolerable lot of the lowest group, and yet those on top do not see this and can be immediately provoked to the cry, 'You are preaching class-hatred', by any man who calls for the lot of the lowest group to be improved, in the interests of all.

I suppose the bees and the ants offer our human civilization, to use the word currently fashionable, the best examples of communities organized on the principle of each-for-all and all-for-each. England is like a beehive in which all the bees strive desperately to sting each other and each bee regards its own cell as its castle, owing no greater allegiance to the hive. Each-for-each and the devil-take-my-neighbour.

We cannot have progressed socially very far since the days of Dickens and Hogarth, since it is possible for such an appalling picture as this to be given in the Letters Column of *The Times*, from Miss Tennyson Jesse:

In the course of my work I have, in the last few years, attended many trials at the Central Criminal Court, and am nearly always horrified by the low physical and mental standards of the accused persons. Stunted, misshapen creatures, only capable of understanding the very simplest language and quite incapable of thought, moved by impulses at the best sentimental, at the worst brutal. During a trial when witnesses and accused are of this sub-human sort, it is as though a flat stone in the garden had been raised and pale, wriggling things, that had never seen the light, were exposed.

'There'll always be an England, and England will be free, as long as England means to you, what England means to me' — hurray, hurrah, hurroo.

## SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

The description I have quoted is exact. I have seen children whom it fitted like a glove. I have seen how quickly they can be changed.

It is a strange and depressing thing that the clamorous body of influential people who most vociferously claim for themselves the name of patriot, who most loudly sing God Save the King, do not like to hear of the existence of these things and places, which they have the greatest power to mend, that they refuse to discuss them, ignore the conditions that exist. They even like to attribute anti-patriotism ('Preaching class-hatred!') to others who insist in speaking of them. Their patriotism is the denial of patriotism, for the word means love of country, and these slum-dwellers and derelict-areans also dwell in this country.

For a patriot, the children, the Britons of to-morrow, are more important than anything else in the country — all of them alike, not only those who are born to become, without exertion, army officers, civil servants, dividend barons, and holiday-makers in America when war comes.

The war brought the unique, never-to-be-repeated opportunity to cure these things. The fear of air raids brought about a thing we had never had before — the withdrawal from the cities of hundreds of thousands of young children, the most precious possession of the nation. The same heaven which dealt death upon the cities sent a promise of life, of the ending, at long last, of the greatest evil in the land, a thing especially shameful because of the wealth of Britain.

Came the mass exodus of the children. Followed the immediate reaction — complaints about their manners, their condition. Not the patriots, the country, the government were to blame for these — no, the slum-dwellers were to blame. 'The country was never so united', wrote the papers. There was by no means undivided unity in this matter — and here was a real chance for real patriots! On the contrary, wailing and lamentation arose from many of the houseowners who had been invited to take children.

A knight committed suicide and shot his wife. ('The evacuees had depressed him?' 'Yes, distinctly'.) A general (a voluntary



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host, to his great credit) said, 'We people who volunteer to take evacuees are the mugs'. A major asked publicly if compensation would be made for vermin brought by the slum-dwellers. (A constructive suggestion, but how would the compensation be assessed, per bug, per bite, per bed, or what? A Ministry of Compensation might be formed, with hundreds of computers. In the end, when the civic mind had progressed far enough, compensation might be given, too, to the original bearers of the vermin, who have to live in the verminous houses. All this would obviously be simpler than just delousing the houses, or pulling them down and building new ones. But in any case there is an insuperable objection to that; the vermin-bearers *like* vermin. 'Give 'em a bath and they put coals in it.')

A naval officer, with a seven-bedroomed house, refused point-blank to take any children; it only cost him a fine of £5 and £4 costs.

A lady billeting officer, again in the famous Letters Column of *The Times*, said: 'Surely we are breaking up that which England and Englishmen love — the home!' At first sight I thought this overrated the slum-dwellers' affection for the slums. My first impression was right. She meant that the homes to which the children were being taken were being broken up.

True, the things that were published about the condition of these children did, for a time, feature as the Third Book of Revelations (the first two being the list of Hitler's broken promises and the White Book about the German concentration camps, both of which dated from 1933). Lady Oxford, writing of 'Children who put us to shame', said that 'if nothing else emerges from unprovoked war, we have learned one thing of paramount importance. We have realized for the first time the shameful squalor in which the inhabitants live in the slums, not only in London, but in half the cities in these islands'.

I claim mildly to be left out of the editorial 'we', for I realized these things and loathed them and wrote about them. I do not know how anybody who does not live in a trance could not realize them.

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What is to be the result of this mass exchange of populations, chiefly young children? Is this heaven-sent opportunity to reform England, to save the growing generation, to be missed? Are we going on, after this war, as we went on after the 1914-18 war? Nemesis may prolong his bill for it this once, but not again. Turn back, reader, if you have the patience, and read again the words that C. E. Montague wrote. Then look around you.

In the end hundred of thousands of children *were* placed in country towns and villages and hamlets, in farms and cottages. They *had* to be — or be massacred.

But, once more, this golden opportunity to strike a real blow for England was missed. Compulsory billeting was introduced in principle, but was not enforced in fact. Those rich people with big houses who did not want 'those nasty little things' (a phrase I heard used) were always able to elude the obligation, or, if they were brought to book, immunity only cost a few pounds.

So the whole thing was 'muddled through'. The children filtered through, as is always the way, chiefly to the homes of the poor or near-poor. There they were left to the goodwill or illwill of the houseowner; there was no nation-wide supervision of them, no use was made of the opportunity for an epochal reform.

Most of their proxy-fathers and proxy-mothers were good ones and grew fond of them. Especially in Devon, which I knew best and where the people are warmer-hearted than in most other places, was the change for the better in their condition and appearance, in their minds and bodies, sometimes almost past belief.

It showed what could be done in England, what could be made of England. In Exeter, for instance, at Christmastide of 1939 (when most of the first 'evacuees' in other parts of the country had wandered resentfully and unhappily back to the slums) ninety per cent had remained, and the Mayor of Exeter, in one of the finest civic speeches I ever heard, said that their physical condition had vastly improved, that they were being well looked after and were happy, and that their parents, as he implored, should leave them where they were.

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Because the air raids did not immediately begin most of the children eventually went back to the slums. This was inevitable in view of the ragged and callous way this great social opportunity was misused; the only idea was to get a lot-of-children-out-of-London, and leave the rest to look after itself. When the air raids began in earnest, or just before, they were sent away again. As I write they are still in the country and are likely to remain there until the end of the war.

And what then? There is not a sign, not the vestige of a sign, that anything more will be done than to provide trains to take-them-back-to-the-slums.

I hope there is some man or woman in England, with power, who may see the criminal folly of this. Is all they have gained to be lost? Are they just to wriggle back beneath their stones, recapture their adenoids and sores and eczema and ringworm and bed-dirtying-habits, the feeling of outlawry which they are losing or have lost? At this moment many of them are growing into fine upstanding English children. They are losing their physical ailments and their mental ailments. Their faces are gaining that expression of vigour and interest-in-life and energy and self-pride which distinguishes the grown men from the Dominions.

Turn back again and read C. E. Montague, and think that he wrote of twenty-five years ago, that we now have those twenty-five years of 'progress' behind us. A Rake's Progress!

If we allow this we deserve anything that may befall us. When I think of those children in the little white house the prospect sickens me.

## CHAPTER 7

### HOME GUARD

I LIKE to think that when this war is over I shall be able to add to my insert in *Who's Who*, if such a work is still published and if I still appear in it, the words 'Greater War: served in the Guards (Home).'

In point of fact I was never sure whether I was in the Home Guard or not; I seemed to be in, but not of it. True, as soon as Anthony Eden sounded his clarion call ('you will now be able to help defend your country with arms') I rushed to the local police station to fill in those forms-in-triplicate which are the invention and jealously guarded prerogative of our officialdom, but that seemed likely to be the last I should ever hear of the Home Guard — after all, there was only an invasion at hand — until one day I met a member of it, and after that, I gathered that I was in it, though I never was appointed to a section, never knew whose orders I had to obey or what my duties were. However, the little white house, being halfway-to-somewhere-or-other, and possessing a telephone, occasionally seemed to act as a kind of emergency field headquarters, and at those times I was apparently a Home Guard.

June and July dragged on, and from day to day I waited to hear that the invasion had begun. By this time I was beginning to feel puzzled. Why on earth was Hitler leaving us so much *time*? I could not make head or tail of it. I believed, and believe to this day, that he *must* try it. Without it all he has done loses meaning.

I was happy with every day that passed and brought no news of it, for I felt that every day meant a better chance for us. The country was still woefully unready. But I had mental visions of ships, steaming across the ocean to us laden with arms and munitions, of men busy somewhere on our coasts — not, at that

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time, on the coasts I knew, it is true — with barbed wire and tank traps and machine guns and mortars.

The Home Guard did its best, and tried hard to make good in enthusiasm what it lacked in arms and uniforms — and it had none of these. There was a time, at the beginning, when it turned out every time the air raid warning sounded. The thought of clouds of parachutists falling upon us from the skies was at that time in everybody's minds, for they had played so great a part in the conquest of Holland.

When the sirens sounded, therefore, the Home Guard turned out and sped to its duty stations. I do not remember that we ever saw a German aeroplane; in those early days the alarms may have portended the approach of aircraft at points on the coast many miles away, I don't know. In any case, they never reached Dullmouth.

Now the section of the Home Guard to which I seemed vaguely to belong lived at the bottom of the hill (a very steep hill), about a mile and a half below the little white house. When the sirens called its members had to drop everything and speed up the hill, collecting me on the way, and then proceed to man a crossroads a quarter-of-a-mile further on, where stood an ancient toll-house, a relic of the customs-officers-and-smugglers days. It was a good vantage point and if any parachutists had descended anywhere thereabouts we should undoubtedly have seen them.

The trouble was that we never *could* get to the crossroads before the all-clear sounded. The first time this happened the other Home Guards, from the bottom of the hill, sped up it afoot, and it was, as I say, a very steep hill. Some time before they were able to reach and collect me, the all-clear had sounded. Determined not to be thus thwarted, they came up by car the next time, but just as they arrived, breathless but resolute, at my door, my telephone rang to say that the all-clear had been given.

Then came the great day when whisper said that the Home Guard had received some arms. Arms! It seemed too good to be true. But it was true. Eight ancient rifles had arrived from

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somewhere, and eight fortunate members of the Home Guard had obtained them.

The next piece of news — the defence of Britain was now gaining momentum every day — was that uniforms were beginning to come in. The trousers came first. I knew a man who obtained a pair. He was a very big man, well over six feet high. When he pulled his trousers up to his armpits there was still a large surplus at the bottom end which had to be turned up. Those trousers were certainly fit for heroes to live in.

Meanwhile — July was now growing into August — the full-time defenders of the country began to prepare the defence of the Devon coasts, which, until then, had been a constant nightmare to me by their openness. At last! At least we would be able to give the Germans something for their trouble if they came now — and still the days were passing, and no invasion!

Then came the greatest day of all, the day when I felt myself at last a fully-fledged Home Guard — for the Home Guard had been detailed to man a machine gun and I was one of the gunners!

The gun was a Hotchkiss, of such first-class material, including much brass, and excellent workmanship that it was every bit as good as it had been about the time of the Boer War, when it was made. It was mounted on a platform in front of the coastguards' flagstaff, and the wire ropes which held this firm were in front of it and in the line of fire, so that I had visions of the Home Guard, when it opened fire on the oncoming German hordes, snapping those cables and dying picturesquely beneath the ruins of the collapsing flagstaff.

It was a good gun but it would not fire more than three shots. The young naval officer who had come to instruct us in its use, and the petty officer he brought with him, took it to pieces, pored over its innards, put it together again — but it still fired only three shots. The petty officer insisted that the recoil was too weak, so he took out the spring and increased the pressure. Still only three shots! He tightened the spring again, and this time the gun fired two shots. He took out the spring once more, tautened it again, and the gun now refused to fire more than one

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shot at a time. Then the young lieutenant took out the spring and relaxed it and from that moment the Hotchkiss was a good gun and rat-a-tat-tatted away without a hitch. We tried it out on a rock in the bay and, though it kicked like a horse, I was glad to find that I had not forgotten how to use a machine gun.

What a feeling that was, after those weeks and months of sickening waiting and impotent anxiety, to have a machine gun in one's hands again! I looked along the coasts, east and west, and hoped that there were thousands and thousands more.

Unfortunately, the purpose for which we were there was somewhat vague. As far as anyone ever understood, our duty, which kept us on that windy coast all night, from dusk to dawn, was to watch for low-flying German mine-dropping aeroplanes, and to shoot at them when they passed within a certain line of fire. I would much sooner have had a general order to fire at any Germans I saw, but that seemed too much to hope for.

The conditions for this particular action seemed rather difficult to fulfil. First, the obliging German aeroplane had to fly at a certain height; second, it had to fly along a certain line; and third, we had to be able to see it, at night. It seemed to me about as unlikely as anything could be that all those three conditions would be fulfilled at once. Also, it was never quite clear who was in command of that machine gun, the young naval officer, whom we never saw again, or the commander of the Home Guard, or whether the officer commanding the regular troops near by, who were much startled when we once began practising with the gun, had anything to say in the matter, or lastly, whether the actual order to fire was to come from the coastguards.

On top of all that, on the other side of the bay, dead in the line of fire which we had been given, stood one or two stately homes. I felt that, while England most certainly needed awakening, a sudden burst of machine-gun bullets, rattling against their walls, might startle their occupants rather too much. I diffidently pointed this out to the young lieutenant. 'What the heck?' he said, 'this is war'. Ah, a man after my own heart, thought I, and I gleefully took my turn at practice with the gun, using the rock

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as a target. As I say, this unexpected amateur noise from above caused some surprise and perturbation among the regular defenders of our coasts, who were busy preparing for the Germans below.

Still, I was glad to take any kind of duty, however wasted, behind a machine gun, on the outside chance that I might see a German to fire at.

I lay out on that bleak cliff many nights, waiting for the mine-laying aeroplane. It never came, alack, alas. Of all sad words. . . . Nevertheless, I would not have missed that duty for anything. There *might* have been a chance.

And on these cliffs, which had seen Drake fare forth, I found England again. The men who shared the duty with me were of all kinds but their hearts were the hearts of oak that had made England great long, long before. There was a sailor, brought back from the Navy because he was a skilled workman. He was a keen, lusty fellow, who had already fought off German aeroplanes with a machine gun, at sea. He knew all about the gun and all about fighting. He was a man to have with you, if the Germans came. There was a sixteen-year-old lad, who worked hard all day in the shipyard and came out at night to watch. There were men of all ages and trades, but all keen as mustard and staunch as oak.

What a force the Home Guard could have been, if this material had been properly used, what a force it still could be! But in England you always come back to the 'If. . .' The men are there, but the dead hand from above weighs on all energy and enterprise.

August, too, slowly passed, and the coastal defences all over the country were growing stronger and stronger. Those vast expanses of flat land, where troop-carrying aeroplanes could have landed, with none to say them nay, which had so worried me in the summer months, were now covered with obstacles. In the air our fighters were taking heavier and heavier toll of Göring's bombers.

What in the name of anything was Hitler waiting for, I wondered and wondered.



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The failure of the invasion to begin was now almost worse than an invasion begun — for I felt that it must come, and the fact that it did not come meant that something was afoot that I could not understand. There was some strange gap in the calculations. It was simply fantastic that Hitler, having had us almost at his mercy, should wait and wait like this, and let us strengthen our defences, re-organize and re-arm and re-equip our armies. What was he up to?

Then, at the beginning of September, came Hitler's ranting and raving speech, in which he swore to raze our cities, and the air raids on London began.

Now it's coming, I thought, I knew it had to. He's simply needed more time to prepare than seemed likely, than we could have hoped. Now the invasion is going to begin.

I went to London, to watch the progress of that invasion.

PART FOUR

DECLINE TO FALL



## CHAPTER I

### LORELEI

I CAME along Piccadilly spellbound by the beauty of the night, for above it hung a moon like a slice of melon and a star like the Koh-i-noor and the anti-aircraft guns were throwing more and more stars into the firmament and the searchlights crossed their blades to make a bridal arch and beneath this, down the deserted street, marched the endless parade of the traffic lights, green-red-yellow, green-red-yellow, green-red-yellow . . . .

No traffic and no life were there, but the lights serenely marshalled ghostly legions of buses and taxicabs, halted them to let spectral groups of pedestrians cross the roadway, released them again for their further journeyings. Green-red-yellow, green-red-yellow; the traffic lights, their occupation gone, placidly pursued their occupation, mocking with their imperturbability the menacing drone that filled the air, the bombs that hurtled vindictively down and rabidly tore bricks and mortar asunder near by, the fear that huddled underground.

It was September the 10th, 1940. I was savagely bitter and savagely happy — bitter, because at last the thing had come to London that had so long been my nightmare; happy, because it *had* come at last, because the years of waiting were over, because we now soon should know our fate, whether London was to be laid in ruins and England enslaved, and the last hope extinguished, for me, for freemen and men who wanted to be free everywhere, even for the world, or whether we should at the end survive, fight back, be able to live and hope and work again.

For this, my instinct surely told me, was the prelude to the invasion, without which all Hitler's glittering victories would turn to dross in his hands. (I was right about this; these *were* the critical days.) The waiting was over. I felt that savage satisfaction. Now I soon should know; I went along empty Piccadilly in a mood of angry and eager anticipation.

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Above the Burlington Arcade a glow, like a splash of red ink, spread into the night from a fire in Bond Street, and the fire-bells clanged in the distance. A piece of anti-aircraft shell smacked into the pavement and I bent to look at it.

'Are you enjoying yourself?' said a voice.

I turned and saw, in a doorway, a girl, leaning against the wall. Although it was night, I could see her perfectly; and, as I found afterwards, something within her, youth, spirit, I don't know what, gave her at all times an inner radiance which caused her to stand out against any background, in any company.

It was as if a spotlight followed her everywhere she went. I turned to look at her once as she sat beside me in the darkened auditorium of a theatre and was transfixed, again, by that illumination she carried with her. Next to her sat an old, old man, who had fallen asleep; his head was sunken on his chest, and all the lines of his face and figure, the closed eyes, the painfully clamped lips, the chin, ran on the down gradient of age. All her lines — the brim of her big hat, the long lashes of her eagerly open eyes, the upper one of her parted lips — ran ardently upward, like youth making light of a hill. Both, the old man and she, sat in the same light, yet he seemed sunken in shadow, while she looked as if an errant sunbeam had wandered into that darkened theatre and picked her out. Gold and grey, up gradient and down gradient, youth and age: what a picture to paint if I could have painted!

I looked at her in the doorway, so vivid in the dusk. She was young, perhaps twenty, and slender as a foal. Her grey trousers gripped her firmly about her tiny waist and good square shoulders lifted her red jumper so that it clung firmly to her firm breasts. Two large eyes and a long row of large white teeth shone at me from her pale face, set in a great cluster of amber hair, which she was carelessly combing.

I was without words for a moment, standing there with the piece of warm shell-casing in my hand. The fire in Bond Street blazed up and the glow lit her face. She was lovely. Her eyes danced, just as her feet, I later found, always longed to dance.

## LORELEI

Her smile was entrancing, and real; she was laughing at me from her heart. And she continued, casually, to comb her hair.

'Good evening, Lorelei,' I said, 'I have been told that our frontier is on the Rhine, these days, but I did not know you had come to Piccadilly.'

'Laura Whats-it?' she said, the comb halted in mid-hair and her dark eyebrows suspended in interrogation.

'Lorelei,' I said, 'the Rhine maiden, who sits on a romantic headland and combs her golden hair.'

'Oh,' she said, doubtfully, releasing the comb, and then, suddenly, eagerly, smiling again and deeply interested, 'tell me some more about her. Am I like her?'

'Well, you *looked* very much like her when I saw you just now. She sits on that headland, overlooking the Rhine, and combs her long and lovely golden hair, and by that device lures the mariners below to their destruction, who should have eyes only for their steering, but who, blinded by this ancient feminine wile, run their craft upon the rocks and are drowned.'

She gave a sudden peal of laughter, loud and long, and jigged about with delight. 'You'd better look out,' she said.

'I thought you might say that,' I answered, 'but I am an experienced navigator, who keeps his eyes always on his steering, especially in Piccadilly, and in any case I am colour-blind in my good eye. But tell me, Lorelei, for I never expected to prize open this great grey oyster London and find such a pearl as you within, who are you and what are you doing here? Are you one of these sirens, or sirens, I have been hearing so much about? Do you know that you should not stand here, on such a night as this, and that even in the last war, when bombs were few and far between, do you know that a lady of the town was killed by a bomb while she stood at Swan and Edgar's corner, just over there? What is your name?'

She told me.

'It's a good name,' I said, 'but I shall call you Sireen, in memory of Lorelei.'

'What is your name?' she asked.

## DECLINE TO FALL

I told her mine. 'And now tell me what you do here, in this doorway?' I said.

'That's easy,' she said, and turned and pointed down some stairs behind, 'I sleep here.'

'This is where you live?' I said.

'No,' she said, 'this is where I work. I design clothes. But I was bombed out of my diggings in Victoria last night, and the chief has allowed me and some other girls, who can't get home, to shake down in a workroom in the basement. We are safe there.'

'But you're not safe here,' I said.

'Oh, I just came up to see what was going on,' she said, putting her head out of the doorway to look at the searchlights roving over the Royal Academy and the glow of the fire in Bond Street. 'I couldn't sleep, yet, and anyway, I have to come up and look round now and again. This excites me.' And suddenly, shuffling her feet and wagging an admonitory forefinger and laughing, she began to sing, in a clear voice, 'One, two, BOMBS-a-daisy . . .'

'I like the step,' I said. 'What is it?'

'Good Lord,' she said, 'don't you know, I'm trucking,' and, still singing and laughing and shaking that forefinger, she danced to and fro in the doorway.

She was extraordinarily natural and gay and invigorating, she seemed to me quite unlike an English girl, more like a Parisienne or a Viennese; she had something in her, as a jumping bean has something in it, that kept her always ahop, and her eyes shone with the pleasure she found in being alive. I watched her entranced, while the bombs crashed far and near, and the heavens hummed and the searchlights groped about and the green-red-yellow parade continued.

'Sing something else,' I said, when she had finished.

'All right,' she said, and suddenly the smile was gone, and her face was composed and peaceful, and, untying a kerchief from her throat, she draped it nunlike round her face and, leaning against the wall, sang softly 'Ave Maria,' while I listened spellbound, and then she quickly arranged the kerchief around her shoulders, millgirl-like, and sang 'Nellie Dean,' and then she quickly bound

it, turban-like, round her hair, and became a hard and glittering courtesan and sang something about a sugar-daddy, and then, quite suddenly again, the courtesan and the kerchief were gone, and, her abundant hair released and dancing round her face, she was gaily 'trucking' backward and forward in the doorway, laughter gleaming from her teeth and eyes and the long forefinger wagging; I found, afterwards, that this 'trucking' was her natural way of expressing the joy she found in being alive, and it enchanted me.

'Sireen,' I said, when she had finished, 'queen of all the sireens in London town, that was lovely and you are lovely, and I have watched girls dancing and singing all over Europe, but none of them ever bewitched me as you have done this night. When I think that I spent money and time to-night upon the last performance of the last show to remain open in the city, while this was waiting for me round the corner!'

'You've been to the theatre,' she said, immediately rapt. 'Tell me about it.'

'I'll tell you about it, and much more,' I said, 'but let us go somewhere where we can eat. Let us seek a good feed in this naughty world. Come on.'

'Oh, I don't know about that,' she said doubtfully, 'I don't suppose there 's anywhere we *could* eat now, all the places are closed or closing, and anyway I don't think I could go like this' — she looked down at her trousers — 'and apart from all that, I'm not scared, but I'm not so fond as you seem to be of walking about in this,' and she looked out at the searchlights and the glow in the sky.

'Oh, come along,' I said, 'we shall find something to eat somewhere, at a hotel if nothing else is open, and you can most certainly come like that, for this is wartime and you would outshine all other sireens, anyway, however you were dressed, and apart from all that, I can tell you a thing that may seem strange to you. I have a very strong conviction that I am not going to be killed in this war, and my instincts in these matters are trustworthy, so come with me and fear not. This encounter is not meant to end



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so abruptly and I have much to tell you, for, though you cannot suspect this, you have played skittles with my thoughts and ideas to-night and I want to sort them out anew in your company.'

She listened, without understanding, but already smiling again, eagerly, afidget to go. With this charming girl, a doubt overcome was a doubt dismissed, dead, buried and forgotten. 'All right,' she said, trucking a little in gay anticipation, 'let's go.'

So she linked her arm in mine, and, lively and laughing, tripped along Piccadilly at my side, seemingly oblivious of the din. She was gay, witty, lovely and young, and I had spoken truth when I told her that, in that brief half an hour, she had played skittles with the thoughts that preoccupied me. How could I ever have doubted life, I thought, as I looked at her? The spark that animated her was reassuring where all the promises and admonitions of priests and politicians were empty and repellent. She, the girl who trucked and sang in a doorway while the bombs were falling, gave me the answer I had sought and despaired of finding.

It had been a very strange evening for me. At the theatre I had visited I had seen by chance a woman who sang a song called 'There's nothing to find out'. With empty, worn and disillusioned face, a glass of absinthe in her hand, she sat in a café in Paris, and sang of the many lovers she had had and lost, and of the other lovers, young people, in 'Paris in springtime'. They, she sang mockingly, 'will all find out in time, that there's nothing to find out'.

I watched her with horrified fascination. Was this the answer, that there was nothing to find out, that life meant nothing but hopes and ideals always thwarted? Outside I could hear the booms: the theatre was three-parts empty and was to close next day, the last to shut. Hitler's invasion, I knew, was now being prepared and would probably be launched at any moment. I looked back along the years to the last war, as I watched her, to Hitler's triumph in Berlin, to the invasions of Austria and Czechoslovakia, to the long and exhausting struggle to inform England about the coming war, and to its dreary advent. So many years of wasted effort and disappointed hopes, and now — this, London, at last,

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under fire, and the invasion imminent. If it succeeded my own day was done, but that was unimportant; England, Britain, the world would sink into a state in which life could be no more than living death. Then there would, indeed, be 'nothing to find out'. Was this wretched woman, I wondered as I watched her, the unknowing prophetess of that calamity? I thought of the opposite philosophy, the one I had always cherished, the creed of the old prospectors — 'There 's gold in them thar hills'! Perhaps they never reached those hills, or, if they reached them, no gold was there, but they always kept on keeping on. 'There 's nothing to find out'; 'There 's gold in them thar hills'. Which was true? If the invasion succeeded the first would be true.

So, when I left the theatre that night, that infernal refrain, 'There 's nothing to find out', kept running through my head. A man who had been in the 1914-1918 war, who then by hard work had built himself a livelihood in the following years and now found himself back where he began, was hard-driven to believe that this *was* the answer.

The girl in the doorway, for reasons that were still not clear to myself, had suddenly made me realize that it was not. There *was* gold in them thar hills, but even if there was not, you kept on keeping on. The very fact that she thought so little about the things that preoccupied me, that she, at twenty, was so blithely unconcerned about the present and the future, that singing and trucking, not bombs or invasion, held her thoughts, completely changed my mood. It was an unreasonable change, for I knew that she was quite ignorant of the things that threatened, that she simply obeyed her instinct, which was to laugh and be merry. But somehow, I suddenly knew that her instinct was right, that the future was not going to be that dark abyss which I had feared, but that we should yet come through it again into the light. And just as suddenly I realized that fear, even fear for others, for one's country, for anything at all, is waste. Lorelei-in-the-doorway — how little she would understand it — had made me see this. The picture of her trucking and singing, that night, with the bombs falling, would never leave me again.

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She trucked along beside me, chatting busily. 'Do you *like* walking about in this?' she said.

'I do, rather,' I said, 'it lets me feel that I am *in* this war, that I do not belong to those people who talk so much about "what we are fighting for" yet themselves never stir within reach of danger. Not that I am brave, or like bravado. But I had much experience of walking about shelled towns in the last war and know that there is a certain technique by which, if one does not pitch actually in your ear, you may nearly always dodge what is coming, and thus walk about in relative safety.'

At this moment there was a sizzling and rushing noise and, as we had just reached a street corner where one of those iron receptacles stand in which the authorities keep sand or something, I pulled her down behind it. On the far side of it, about thirty yards away, some bolt from the blue crashed noisily into a house, without exploding. Glass spattered down into the street. When it had finished falling I looked round at her. She was peeping over the top of the bin, giggling.

'I hope your technique is as good as you make out,' she said. 'I seem to be putting a lot of faith in you.'

'Come on, Sireen,' I said, 'let's find that meal.'

But every place we went to was closed, and at last I saw that if we were to get anything we should have to go to the Hotel Modestic, where I was known. But it was some long distance away and, for all my technique, I was a little doubtful whether I ought to keep my sireen trailing round London in that din, and I was about to take her back to her basement when, crawling towards us from a side street, I saw the muffled headlights of a car.

Scarcely trusting my eyes, for in those early days of the air-raiding a vehicle or a human being were as rare in the London streets as snow in Central Africa, I called 'Taxi', and it drew up to the kerb and stopped. 'Hullo, friend,' said I, 'do *you* too like driving about in this?' 'Yes, I do,' said the elderly man in the driver's seat casually, 'I should hate to die in my bed.'

'A twin soul,' I cried, while Lorelei laughed loud in the night — there was never anything of silver bells or coy girlishness in her

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laugh, it was startlingly loud and when it was finished ended with a snort, which she could not suppress and which always made her begin to laugh all over again, and sometimes, by pretending to wait anxiously for the snort, I could keep the two of us for minutes on end in a condition of weak and helpless mirth — 'Your affection for the great open spaces of this deserted and pitch-black city, half as old as time, is my salvation. Drive me to the Hotel Modestic,' and we climbed in.

The lounge of the Hotel Modestic was filled with recumbent or reclining forms, in strange raiment. Afterwards people, realizing that the risks they ran were not excessive, that the end of the world was after all not yet, became used to life beneath the bombs; they made themselves relatively comfortable in the underground stations or the air-raid shelters, or if they were too timid even for that withdrew to the country, or they sought out basement and ground-floor dwellings in tall apartment houses, or they just ignored the bombs and took their chance, continuing to sleep in top-story flats or two-story houses.

But in the early days London was a city of fear, that you could read in the faces of the people running to shelter every time the sirens sounded (later they came almost to ignore these), of the people hurrying to get home before dusk fell, and especially of the people who thronged to the big hotels, thinking these tall buildings safer than their own homes.

Indeed, they had reason to be afraid, for, after a year of war, the air-raids found London still almost completely unprepared, and in Rotterdam, a few months before, the German airmen had destroyed *thirty thousand human beings in half an hour* — a thing too little known. That, on a far greater scale, was the thing I had for so many years foreseen and feared for London. In the event, it never happened. Though death and destruction came, they never approached the dimensions of the great massacre, the human calamity unprecedented in European history, which was to be expected after so many years of idle ostrichism. The avalanche *did* turn aside and dissolve just as it threatened to overwhelm the greatest single community of human beings in the world.

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But on that night fear infected the city like a pest. It led people to do the stupidest things. The usually genteel lounge of the Hotel Modestic, where county ladies come to town were wont to dispense tea and small talk to their friends, was filled with men in dressing-gowns and women in all kinds of sleeping-suits and siren-suits.

They lay on sofas or sat, among cushions, on chairs, their eyes closed in simulated sleep or open in anxious wakefulness. They had all come down to the lounge from the upper floors, these unthinking people, because they thought it safer. They did not notice, or were too scared to realize, that the lounge, occupying the central well of the hotel, which was built in the form of a box, had nothing but its ornate glass roof between it and the sky; a bomb, falling through this, would have wrecked the lounge and the ground floor utterly; the middle storys would have been much safer.

(Bombs, anyway, are quite incalculable in their working, and if you are not prepared to delve deep underground it is best not to try and outmanœuvre them. In this hotel my room was in an outer wing, built on to the original structure at some time, and had nothing above it. I lived in it quite happily, and the only air-raid precaution I took was to affix to the door handle the notice, kindly provided by the management, 'Do not disturb.' Hitler respected this. When a large bomb ultimately made the hotel uninhabitable, the few rooms in this outer wing, which were regarded as the most dangerous in the hotel, remained unscathed.)

The lounge, on this night, looked like a gipsy encampment, and into it came Lorelei and I, picking our way between the chairs and sofas. She tripped over a slipped foot and a moment later the laughter which I saw her try to suppress escaped with one of her loudest snorts.

A recumbent form on a sofa sat up; bleary eyes looked indignantly after her from a red face beneath tufts of disordered grey hair. A hot-water bottle fell to the floor. A bomb fell in the distance, and the resolutely closed eyelids of a prostrate lady in a hair-net quivered in anguished protest. An elderly man in a long

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dressings-gown, with a gasmask slung by a strap from his shoulder and a thermos bottle in his pocket, paced agitatedly up and down on felt soles. From another sofa in a distant corner, where it lay alongside its beshawled proprietress, a Pekinese raised its head, looked at us with solemn, bulging, hate-filled eyes, and spitefully yapped.

It was too much, and laughter escaped from Lorelei like wind from a punctured tyre. Even a bomb could not have caused much more commotion in that place. The people in it seemingly feared that if a noise were made they would not be able to hear the bombs explode. Reproachful heads were raised and turned on all sides.

'Ssh,' they murmured.

Lorelei, with her long grey-clad legs and blazing red jumper, holding her hand tightly across her mouth, sped on, and I guided her through a door and into the reading-room. This was deserted — because it had a window looking on the street, and the loungers thought this much more dangerous than a glass roof overhead! A bright coal fire burned there. I found my friend the night waiter. He brought coffee and sandwiches. We settled down in two large arm-chairs on either side of the fire, Lorelei still giggling.

'At last,' I said.

A heavy bomb fell near at hand. The glass in the windows rattled and the building shook. 'Hush-a-bye baby, in the tree-top, when the wind blows, the cradle will rock,' I sang.

Lorelei, this time, was not amused.

'Ooh, that was a big one,' she said, big-eyed. 'Do you think we ought to stay here?'

'That wasn't a bomb,' I said, 'that was one of our anti-aircraft guns firing.'

'Oh no, it wasn't,' she said, 'it was a bomb. Didn't you feel the building shake?'

'Look here,' I said, 'the only way to enjoy air-raids is to assume that all those bluddy great bangs are anti-aircraft guns. Moreover, I have already told you that you are safe with me, for my instinct tells me that no bomb is going to reach me in this war, and my instinct is sound. And furthermore, nothing in this world is

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wasted in such quantities as fear.' This was the thought which had suddenly come to me, like a blinding revelation, that very evening, when I first saw her, dancing in the doorway, and now I was big to bursting with this, as I always am with a new idea; it seemed to me the most self-evident truth, that only had to be stated to convince all men.

She looked at me doubtfully for a moment, and then suddenly leaned back in her chair, with her feet tucked beneath her, began to nibble a sandwich and smiled. 'All right, then,' she said, 'but I hope you *are* right about your technique and your instinct.'

This was the most charming thing about this exceptionally charming girl — her habit of obedience and ability to obey, once she was convinced.

She had a most critical mind, of rare penetration and keenness, and could with one deadsure, well-chosen word annihilate false ideas and false arguments, however well or wordily presented. But if her reason were convinced or her imagination captured, she could immediately put her critical mind aside and yield herself with the utmost enthusiasm to the enjoyment of the hour. From this moment on, with disarming and enchanting docility, she adopted my philosophy about bombs, and danced and laughed at my side for the remainder of our brief acquaintance; it was not only that she refused to be scared, she fully accepted my theory that this was an experience to be relished, and she lived her life under fire with the same gusto that she always showed in quieter times.

To share a cup of coffee with her was an adventure; she tasted every moment of her life with the enjoyment of a gourmand eating truffles, and yet all unconsciously. To meet so vivid and invigorating a creature at such a time was a gift from the gods. Her looks, her courage and her gaiety were all rare and all her own; but her critical mind and her wit kept me constantly astonished.

In that London, it was as if you met a humming-bird in Silver-town. She was of humble origin and but little schooled, as was I, and I kept an imaginary plumed hat always doffed in tribute to her. How I had dreaded, and for how long, the thing that had

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come upon London! And now it had come, I found myself exulting in this gay companionship. She was like a living fragment of rainbow. The bad days were good ones. 'The best of times and the worst of times' — was that not Dickens's excellent phrase? She showed me how true it could be.

We talked and laughed and laughed and talked. 'What do you do?' she said. 'Do you work or have you no need to?'

'Oh yes,' I said, 'I write.'

'Are you well known?' she said.

'No, nor even notorious,' I said. Then I told her something of my life and of the years I had spent close to the brewing war, how I had long seen it coming and feared it and how, that evening in the theatre, I had been at my wits' end to find a pattern or a meaning in life, how I had nearly thought to discover the truth in that absinthe-born philosophy 'There's nothing to find out', how I had nearly deposed my other philosophy 'There's gold in them thar hills' in favour of it, and how much she, all unknowing, had done to somersault my thoughts again.

She listened, attentive but uncomprehending. Clever though she was, I knew she would never understand this, but it did not matter. Even though she could not understand she liked to listen to me, liked my voice and the things I said and the jokes I made. She laughed easily, and I loved to make her laugh, for she was enchanting when she laughed.

'How old are you?' she said suddenly.

'Forty-five,' I said.

'You don't look it,' said she.

'I was afraid you would say that, Sireen,' I answered, 'because, exceptionally sharp as your wit is, you have not yet mastered the art of avoiding the obvious. You soon will. A woman can only say one worse thing to a man than that he doesn't look his age — namely, that she doesn't like good-looking men. How often have women said that to me, and looked pointedly at me as they said it. You are too witty to be as unsubtle as most of your sisters. I am, feel, and look forty-five, and am ready to quarrel with anybody who tells me different. I am in the prime of life.'



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I always was, I am, and, now that I have met you, I always will be. True, I feel a little less glamorous and photogenic than of yore, but that is the result of overmuch preoccupation with the times and their follies; I should have realized, and do realize to-night, that man, however much he try, cannot destroy this planet. I have some of the minor ailments of age — for instance, my hair, which grows in increasing profusion on almost every other part of my body, persistently tries to escape from my head; parting it is such sweet sorrow. But I have none of the major ailments of age: I do not write-letters-to-the-*Times*, play golf, knit, or fall in love. I am, as I say, in the full bloom of my life. I was never so good as I am now, though I shall yet be better. These forty-five years have been so full of interesting experiences that I am determined to look every minute of them, and I will not let you take even a single second of them from me. In short, I am your humble servant, and I am forty-five.'

Lorelei listened to this with the most vivid amusement dancing in her eyes — and this time she understood. She was, as I say, one of the quickest creatures in perception I ever met, and although she could not follow the story of my spiritual perplexities which I had previously told her, she immediately saw the thread of truth and reason which, I hope, ran through this idle discourse, and I dare swear that she will never again tell a man that he 'does not look it'. Also, I was lucky enough for her to find me entertaining.

'I like your patter,' she said, gurgling.

'Isn't it good,' I said, 'and I never dry up, but it is very late, and if you want to sleep to-night we must be on our way, for we shall never find another taxicab, unless you can sleep in that chair.'

She listened for a moment to the noise outside. 'It's very noisy,' she said, hesitatingly. 'Do you think I could sleep here?'

'You certainly *may*, if you *can*,' said I.

'Then I will,' she said, and curling up in the big chair she said 'Good night' and immediately fell asleep. I was astonished. I never saw another human creature cover the distance between waking and sleeping so quickly. She closed her eyes — and she was asleep. I stirred the fire and put my overcoat over her.

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I watched her for a long time. She gave herself as completely to sleep as she gave herself to life during every moment of her waking day. She passed into a peaceful oblivion where no bomb or gun or siren could penetrate, and when she awoke she woke suddenly, quite fresh, as if she had never slept. She was very lovely, asleep.

At last I fell asleep myself, and when I woke the day had come, the fire was dead, the bombs had ceased, and in the street outside London bestirred itself. I was stiff and cold and blear-eyed. I pulled myself together, went out to wash and brush my hair, and when I came back she was still asleep. I shook her, gently, at first, and then roughly. At once she was awake, smiling, her wits all about her. 'What's the time?' she said. 'About seven,' I said. 'Come on, let's get some breakfast.' A few quick passes with the comb, a quick glance in her mirror, a pat here and there, and she was ready. 'What a woman!' I thought, and we went out, through the lounge, where some still uneasily slept, into the street, to a place that was open. 'Wait a moment,' she said, 'I must go and tidy myself a bit.'

When she came back she was as bright as the rising sun and as fresh as dew. 'Salute to youth and beauty,' I said, and she laughed gaily and trucked a step or two before she sat down and ate enough breakfast for three. 'Gosh, I was hungry,' she said, when she had finished. 'You were, indeed,' said I, 'and what now?'

'Now I must be getting to work,' she said.

So we walked down Regent Street to Piccadilly and I left her at the doorway where I had met her.

'Sireen,' I said, 'I think you are lovely, to look at and to know, and I am glad I passed this way last night. I always wanted to know a sunbeam. Will you shine upon my noonday hour, upon that dreary feast which in this country is called lunch or luncheon?'

'Yes, of course,' she said, her smile illuminating up her face again as if a light had been switched on inside it, 'if we don't go to one of those lookee-downee-nosee places. I hate expensive restaurants filled with dull people who only have money. And besides, I want to wear these. Do you like me in them?', and she looked down at her long grey-clad legs.

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'You are the one woman in every thousand who can afford to wear such,' I said, 'and we will eat at a place I know called Blowout's Coffee House, where the plebs foregather and where we can get a passable steak and potatoes and some beer for about half a crown. All right?'

'Lovely!' she cried, trucking a little, 'fetch me here at one o'clock', and then, with her face still turned to me and her hand waving and her smile gleaming, she turned and was gone down the steps, like a flash, like a jewel gone from a shop window.

I felt like a man in a room where the blinds had been pulled down. A man's mind, his wit, is like a knife; it needs a grindstone, another mind, another wit, to keep it sharp, and this was a thing I missed more than anything else in England, my native country, where everybody seemed to be just about to say something or frightened to say something or to be trying to look as if he could-say-a-lot-if-he-wished.

This English repression, Wotan knows from where it comes, is a terrifying thing to a man who comes back with a standard of comparison. Foreigners who come to England go in fear and awe of it; they think it betokens some great intellectual and spiritual superiority, held in reserve, as such a thing should be held in reserve by prudent men, and not squandered, and only when they have been thirty years in the country do they discover that there is nothing behind that 'wall-eyed stare', as two American writers described it who wrote of England on the eve of this war, but then they die.

It seemingly means only the Englishman's suspicion of his fellow-Englishman, or his inability to converse agreeably, his mistrust of his kind. He shrouds himself in silence, averts his face from the world, avoids the gaze of others — and, for Cinque-valli's sake, why?

A fantastic example of this state-of-mind, which to me is beyond explanation or understanding, was given by an English writer in describing a voyage aboard ship. He took his exercise, ten-times-round-the-deck, and the first time round he met a fellow-passenger coming in the other direction, and the two brightly

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smiled at each other; the second time they smiled again; the third time the smile was forced; the fourth time they could hardly bear to meet each other's eyes; and whether the ten-times-round were completed I forget, but I doubt it, and the writer mentioned that on this account he envied the snakes he subsequently studied in the jungle because they, encountering each other, just crawled over each other as if the other were not there, and continued on their respective ways.

To envy the snakes! What a comment upon the state which that civilization has now reached, in England, for which we fight to-day.

Yet to most Englishmen of my generation, at any rate to those of the more expensively schooled classes which are commonly said to be educated, this episode would have seemed most diverting.

Now I had met that rare thing in England — a completely natural human being, without any sense of inferiority or superiority, without any inhibitions. If you cast a new idea in her path she did not wince like a salted slug or draw in her horns like a snail retiring into its shell. She opened her mind to it, eagerly examined it, turned it over and looked at it from all sides and, if she liked it, she made it her own.

Because others had told her that the way to enjoy air raids was to burrow into a deep hole, she had burrowed into a deep hole. But when I told her that the way to enjoy them was to behave as if they almost were not, she thought that over quickly, and decided that this *was* the better way; at all events, she would give it a trial. And she was gay, as gay as carnival-time. Her wit was as sharp as a sword. I had to be constantly alert, even when I was talking of things that seemed beyond her ken, lest she slip with some quick interjection under my guard. And in spite of, or because of all these things, she was lovely! I respected her enormously. She puzzled me. How, I thought, had this flower grown in Birmingham — for she had told me that she came from that city. Its natural earth was Montparnasse or Schwabing or Vienna.

I was impatient to see her again, as I walked along Piccadilly.

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Well, I mused, the more it changes the more it is the same, this Piccadilly; here I was, taking a girl to lunch, twenty-five years ago, in a world war, and now we have a world war, and here am I, taking a girl to lunch. Yet there is a change, I thought; for I never then knew a girl wittier or more good-looking than this one, nor even in the years between, so here goes, with a heigh-ho and a derry-down-Piccadilly.

She was waiting, and trucked a little in the doorway when she saw me. Among the most charming of this charming girl's little ways were the little jig she always danced when anything pleased her, and she was easy, not difficult to please, as discerning people should be, and the pleasure she always showed, in this manner, when she saw me. She was, as I say, a person of taste.

She wore her grey trousers and a green jumper and turban and I could have sworn that the radiance she emanated cast a glow over the dark doorway.

'Do I look good?' she said.

'You are a living compliment to my good taste,' I answered.

'You flatter yourself,' she laughed.

'I do, by taking you to lunch,' I said. 'I never pay compliments to others, only to myself, and you are the sincerest compliment I have had for a long time.'

'I like the way you talk,' she said, affectionately slipping her arm through mine.

'I'm rather partial to it myself,' I said. 'Come on, let's go.'

So, arm-in-arm together, we strolled along Piccadilly, where I had clerked to a wine-merchant, where I had tasted the bread of unemployment, where I had often mooned aimlessly along during my brief returns to England, wondering where to go and what to do.

I suddenly discerned beauties in Piccadilly that I had never noticed before. It, and the region around, always seemed to me very dull in peacetime, and I was never moved by the romance with which some writers, in those arid between-war years, sought to invest the berailingled wastes of Mayfair. I frankly could not

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imagine nightingales singing in Berkeley Square; it only came to life, for me, when bombs began to fall in it.

We passed through an arcade, on our way to Blowout's, and came to Jermyn Street. It was a bright and fitfully sunny day, with intermittent clouds, and suddenly, as we strolled along, there was a deafening noise of engines and the rat-a-tat-tat of machine guns firing and a German aeroplane flashed across the gap between housetops and was gone. While we were still looking up, something struck the ground at my feet and I looked down and saw a machine-gun bullet, with flattened nose, which I picked up. It was hot.

'Well, well, well,' I said to my Lorelei, who looked at it with vivid interest, 'a delicate attention, this. For to-day is September the 11th, 1940, and on September the 11th, 1916, I was hit by a German machine-gun bullet in France which, after it was removed from my back, I wore on my watch-chain for some years, ultimately losing it, to my great annoyance, because that is the kind of souvenir you only get once in a lifetime, or at any rate you hope so. And now Hitler has sent one of his men to Jermyn Street to make good my souvenir. The man has tact and feeling.'

So, playing catch with the machine-gun bullet, and singing a little song for which I quickly strung together some words and she some music, 'When the Jermyns assailed me in Jermyn Street,' she trucking a little, we came to Blowout's. She was as full of laughter as champagne is full of bubbles. I was enormously happy. We showed the bullet to the people at Blowout's and were immediately the centre of interest — that was in the early days of air-raiding. Mr. Blowout himself came to see it and, immensely impressed either by it or by myself or possibly by Lorelei, I can guess which, himself chose and served our steaks.

Lorelei, in her brief lunch hour, floated on rosy clouds of bliss and again I envied her this ability to squeeze every moment dry of zest. The object of general and admiring attention, as was her due, and of my own amused homage, she felt as a woman loves to feel — queen of all she surveyed.

She had inexhaustible resources of chatter, which was always

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entertaining, and was a marvellous mimic. She gave me a quick sketch of two refaned ladies, whom she had encountered that morning at her work, one a hushed and portentous gabbler and the other a stereotyped interjector, that kept me helpless with laughter. Impossible adequately to reproduce on paper, because Lorelei herself could never be put on paper, it went something like this:

Hushed gabbler, whispering with coy mien: 'Ay said to her gabble-gabble-gabble-gabble . . .'

Stereotyped interjector: 'Eau yerss?'

Gabbler: 'And she said gabble-gabble-gabble . . .'

Interjector: '*Eau neau!*'

Gabbler: 'So ay said gabble-gabble-gabble . . .'

Interjector: '*Lahvly!*'

Gabbler: 'But of course ay told her gabble-gabble-gabble . . .'

Interjector: '*Eau neau*, ay think that 's *terribly* funny.'

Gabbler: 'Ay told may husband and he gabble-gabble-gabble . . .'

Interjector: 'Eau, that's *terribly* naice.'

And so on and so on.

Everywhere that Lorelei went heads turned in spontaneous and envious admiration of so much youth and beauty and spirit. She was unconscious of these things, only knowing, as any such woman was bound to know, that she was good to look at. She was quite unaware of the extra spark she had within her, of the excellence of her mimicry, of the vividness of her being, of the startling loudness of her laugh, of the rare slenderness of her figure and of her exceptional wit. She had the strangest eyebrows, her own, shaped like arrowheads, and used these, and her hands, lavishly to help her when she was explaining or narrating or mimicking something or somebody.

Her hands were uniquely delicate. The fingers were half-as-long-again as any normal fingers, and very slender, and at the end of them were very long and perfectly shaped oval nails, which she coloured red. These hands were things for an artist to paint, for a poet to adore. Looking at them, as they fluttered and flashed, I suddenly had an idea.

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'Sireen,' I said, 'you are a wonderful mimic and you enthrall me. But take the "c" away from "mimic" and I have what you are. You are Mimi!'

'Who 's she?' said Lorelei, immediately rapt, as she was always when I told her anything about herself.

'Mimi of the Vie de Bohème,' I said, 'don't you know the opera? But of course you don't, how can anybody know any opera in this country?'

'I know the music,' she said, regretfully, 'but I never saw it.' (Lorelei, I must interject, had a very sweet and excellent voice and loved and understood music, which could quickly move her to tears, though she was the least sentimental of creatures. In a country where youth had a chance she would certainly have been a great singer.)

'Whether you ever saw it or not,' I said, 'you are Mimi. I've been trying to remember where I met you before. Now I know. You belong to the Quartier, to the people who laughed because they wanted to and loved when they wanted to and sang always because they had to. Surely it was Mimi who had the lovely hands? I can't for the moment remember quite, it may have been one of the others. But I am sure it was Mimi and you are Mimi, and I can't think how you came from Paris to London.'

'What is Paris like?' she said.

'It was lovely when I saw it last, a few months ago,' I said. 'I think it must be dreadful now. But tell me some more about you.'

She was of working-class parents and, when she left school, had painted flowers-on-glass for a livelihood. Then she had discovered a modest talent for designing clothes and had passed into that trade. When I met her, that night in Piccadilly, she had been but a week in London, having just secured a post that seemed to promise hope of a future.

She was completely candid about herself. She had 'taught herself to speak', she said, and indeed I, who have a fairly keen ear, was at first taken aback to know that she came from a working-class home, for her English was excellent. She spoke without any trace either of a local accent or of that filleted and spineless



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English which the moneyed classes affect. Her choice of words was amazingly good. She seldom used one too many or one too few, and, though she felt herself distressingly under-educated, frequently astonished me by the succinct aptness of her phrases, and sometimes even by the literary quality of her remarks, as on one occasion when she spoke, quite at random and without knowing that she had said anything exceptional, of 'heather growing rusty with the autumn.'

It was sad to notice how so clean a vocabulary had been sullied over by the un-English jargon of the films and the radio.

What a mine of talent there was in such an English girl as this, I thought, and that chance had it — in this England?

She was equally candid — she could no more have been untruthful than a pool could have refused to reflect her face — about her experiences with men. She had had many, as she was bound to have, looking as she looked and being as she was, but all, save one, of which she thought reluctantly, had been brief, boy-and-girl, kiss-and-run encounters.

'Your affairs have all been like poppies,' I said, 'they bloomed quickly, were lovely for a little while, and then as quickly died.'

'Yes,' she said, with a retrospective look in her eyes, 'they *were* like that, I wonder why?'

'I don't know,' I said, 'but I suspect that you were the cause. I don't think you are ready to hold a man, yet, or want to. But did none of your men give you everlasting flowers?'

'What are they?' she said, intent.

'What, you don't know?' said I. 'And you are Mimi? Incredible. Why, they are just the opposite of poppies, they never die, and Mimi, or one of her colleagues, once promised to stay with her lover as long as the flowers in the bowl on his window-ledge remained fresh, and they stayed fresh so long that he was amazed, until he woke one night and saw Mimi tending them. But at last they died, and Mimi, I think it was she, had to leave him.'

'Oh, what a sad little story,' she said.

'Yes,' said I, 'but do you know what he said when Mimi told

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him that she would stay with him as long as the flowers remained fresh?"

'No,' she said, 'what?'

'He said, "If only I had known I would have bought everlasting flowers".'

She laughed vividly. 'I like that,' she said, 'I wish I knew what they were like.'

'Do you?' said I. 'Well, if we see some in a florist's window I'll . . .'

'What?' she asked, smiling in a knowing way, as I paused.

'Ah, I see you know what I was going to say,' I said. 'I was going to say that I would point them out to you.'

Laughter burst from her again and she clapped her hands. 'You win,' she said.

'Well,' I said, 'you see the moral of the tale?'

'What is it?' she asked.

'That if a woman wants to sleep sound and not have to get up in the night she must get her man to buy everlasting flowers,' I said.

'Um-um,' said she, 'or no flowers at all. Your turn.'

'I pass,' said I.

'You're getting slow-witted,' she laughed. 'Are you losing your grip?'

A few noondays, a few evenings, a Saturday afternoon and a Sunday all-day. It was an ideally pleasant companionship. How rare are the human beings who can give zest to others. Her wit wound mine up like a watch, her gaiety kept me on the highest peaks of good humour. I loved to see the eyes of other people casually rest upon her, wander on, then suddenly return and brighten. This happened continually.

I found a restaurant, still open, where a pianist played Viennese and Hungarian music. She was enraptured. She had music in her blood, as everyman and everywoman have it in their blood in those places, but in England this is unusual. She fell in love with a melody by Schubert and I strung some English words on to it and she sang this, often, softly, as we went about London town.

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What a loss she was to the English stage, and how many more are there like her in this country of minds-left-fallow?

London was looking desolate. In those early days of the bombardment, when the removal of wreckage had not been organized and great mounds of debris lay miserably about the streets, when the improvised shelters were dens of human misery, when fires reddened the sky every night and the hum-hum-hum of the raiders never ceased from dusk to dawn, the future looked bleak indeed.

It was impossible, then, to imagine what the city would look like in six months' time, impossible to hope that it would in the event, as actually happened, by that time have become quite used to bombardment and be returning every day more and more to normal life and bustle. It seemed sometimes, in those first weeks, that everything would be hit sooner or later, that the great shopping streets would collapse and die, that light and water would not be able to be maintained, that epidemics would ravage the miserable throngs huddled in the underground stations, that the railways must cease operating.

The anti-aircraft guns, that at first were absent quite, seemed useless against the invisible enemy, for all their barking, and the balloons too. The firemen could not cope with all the fires, and one night, when a great blaze was burning in Oxford Street, near Tottenham Court Road, we saw dozens of hoses coupled together, stretching for miles towards and past Marble Arch, and scores of fire-engines everywhere.

London had no entertainments, but more diversions than ever before; everywhere we went we were turned aside from our path by these yellow placards placed in the middle of the road and bearing the word 'Diversion', so that, after watching for a while the distant figures of those heroes who dug up and removed delayed action bombs from the streets, without acknowledgment or reward, we had to make a long detour. Once, sitting at tea with a friend in an upper room in Regent Street, we saw through the window a house a block away rise in fragments into the air; such a time-bomb had been inside it.

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'H'm, time bomb!' said Lorelei, casually, pausing with her cup half way to her lips.

I laughed. 'How expert we get,' I said, 'time bomb, impact bomb, fire bomb — they have all become part of our daily lives, like catching the bus or buying a paper.' But I admired her very warmly in my heart. This girl had never heard a bomb explode until a few days before, and now she was an old campaigner. I felt as if I were back in the Ypres salient in the last war, exchanging expert comment about shells and bombs with Georgette of the Lion d'Or.

Through the daily and nightly scene of London she went at my side in those days, Lorelei, always laughing, always vividly alive, always keenly interested. It was not then possible to foresee the way London would eventually master both the fear of bombardment and the havoc it caused. It was a desolate time, with winter coming, the nights lengthening, the piles of debris multiplying, the number of the dead and homeless increasing, the nerves of the population tautening.

We saw it from all sides. We walked along Regent Street on a sunny afternoon and quite suddenly, without even the warning of an engine's drone, for the raider was hiding in the clouds with his engine off, something came rushing down with a Niagara-like noise. We had no time even to duck. The thing fell into a house in a near-by street, the roof of which immediately burst into flames: a fire bomb. Out of the shop on the ground-floor, shrieking, panic-stricken, streamed tailoresses, Polish Jewesses, and ran this way and that, like frightened hens.

'Well, I don't know,' said Lorelei, calmly watching them, 'if I had just escaped with a whole skin from a bombed house I should want to shout for joy!'

London at night, at that time, had a fascination for me more irresistible than the town had ever had before. This was the thing I had feared for so long and I wanted to see how it would work out. I was a journalist still, passionately in love with my calling, and felt exhilarated to be in my native city at a time more stirring than any since the Great Fire. But I knew that this exhilaration

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was more than half due to the courageous, merry and lovely companion I had so strangely found. With and through her, this grim ordeal became a gay adventure.

It was fantastic, sometimes, to walk with her through a city that seemed utterly deserted and to reflect that, in reality, there were hundreds of thousands of human beings near by, underground.

Once, as we walked, amid gusts of noise which abruptly ceased, we heard church bells tranquilly chiming the hour in a stillness deeper than London ever knew. 'Funny,' she said, reflectively, with that excellent choice of words which I admired, 'the sudden importance of everyday sounds that you never notice everyday. Those bells are reassuring.'

Another time we came along Edgware Road in a blackness so deep that you needed the flash of the anti-aircraft guns, ever and again, to show the way. Just beyond the old Metropolitan Music Hall, where I had once seen Charlie Chaplin play the drunken swell in 'The Mummie Birds', we found dim red lights in the road, to warn traffic against going further, and in the darkness beyond a great bomb-crater was faintly to be inferred, though not seen. We stood debating whether we, afoot, could go on, when suddenly a voice at our elbows said: 'What's up?'

We turned and found a policeman, whom we had not even suspected. I could just discern his steel helmet.

'Can we get through or must we go round by a side street?' I said.

'Oh, you can get through if you're careful,' he said casually, 'but don't go falling arseovered.'

Lorelei laughed her loudest, and the sound of her laughter echoed and re-echoed down that dead and silent street — the guns and bombs were quiet for a moment — as we groped our way.

We explored the air-raid shelters, high and low, rich and poor; in other words, the underground railway stations, and the expensive hotels where the other unemployed, secure beneath their ten-stories-of-concrete, beguiled these nights. Together we pitied

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the children in the one, despised the flabby poltroons in the other.

'We're all in the front line in this war,' said Lorelei succinctly.

'Sure we are,' said I, 'and we've found a new unity.'

I was completely happy in her company and looked forward to every fresh meeting with her, to every minute of being with her. The gay adventure became ever gayer and more invigorating. We were both so at ease, our minds blended so perfectly, our moods matched so well, our wit was so well balanced, that a stroll through Hyde Park together was at once recreation, refreshment and entertainment, and when thirty German aeroplanes flew overhead, and proceeded placidly on their way in seeming oblivion of the shells that the rabid guns angrily threw up at them, we were able to forget our disappointment in the zest of being alive and together in a stirring time.

But Hitler, whose atrocities have no limit, put an end to this unforgettable interlude, and I never begrudged him anything more, nor hated him so much.

We dined one evening in a restaurant in Piccadilly, so deep down that we did not know whether the night outside was quiet or noisy. But when we stepped out through the swing-doors and turned the corner, Regent Street looked like something from Dante's *Inferno*.

Great fires burned in back streets on either side, so that it was painted red, and across it thick clouds of smoke and coveys of sparks drifted slowly in a light breeze. Bombs and guns, far and near, joined in a deafening din, which was made crazier still by the jangling and clanging of dozens of burglar alarms, set in motion, as I suppose, by the shattered glass. Every window in the street seemed to have been smashed by the blast of explosions and we walked on glass all the way to Oxford Circus, Lorelei a little breathless, for this really *was* a night, but chattering and joking as she tripped along at my side, and occasionally making, in the direction of some especially loud bang, a two-fingered gesture which is not that of benediction used by bishops.

We were going, once more, to the Hotel Modestic, for some

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coffee and a talk. In London at that time there was nowhere else to go, and as the hour was early she neither wanted to return to the boredom of her workshop-bed nor I to that of my hotel bedroom.

The lounge of the Modestic was still like a gipsy encampment, and once again we picked our way between the recumbent forms to the reading-room, where we again found our two big arm-chairs before the fire.

And there we talked long of the things we had seen together, of the afternoon on Hampstead Heath when we had looked down on London and discovered that the silhouette of the city was almost unimpaired, of the burning of Lewis's Store in Oxford Street, which we had watched, of the night when a fireman, having some urgent mission to fulfil, asked for a lift in our taxicab and, as we passed the skeleton of a bombed building near Marble Arch, looked out through the window and remarked seriously, 'Um, that's a bit dishevelled, isn't it?', a comment which seemed to me to be a superb example of the national talent for understatement.

We recaptured all these moments now, sitting in front of the fire in the reading-room, and lived and laughed them over again.

A great cannonade roared outside. The anti-aircraft shells clambered upward with a noise like a stick being run across a piece of corrugated iron.

'Friendly little creatures, aren't they?' said Lorelei, listening to them as the one barked and the other answered, another joined in and a fourth replied. 'Hark at those cannon balls trucking up to heaven. It's like a duet. One seems to say, "Got you, you beggar", and then, to its colleague, next door, "Now you have a go", and then the other shouts "All right, here I am, off we go."'

I laughed at her description, which was apt.

And then we fell into silence, both looking into the fire, until I glanced at Lorelei and saw that, as on that first night, she had fallen asleep.

I leaned back in my chair and watched her. Her loveliness was always as new and surprising, to me, as that of the first snowdrop.

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I felt, each time I looked at her, that I saw her for the first time. I wish I knew what colour to call her hair. It was *not* gold — unless there is some dull gold with a bright glint in it here and there. It was very beautiful hair, very abundant, and fell into the most attractive shapes, no matter what she did to it; not one woman in a thousand has the luck to possess such hair, and I had noticed, times beyond number, the fascinated, half-admiring, wholly envious glances that other women directed towards it wherever she went — for Lorelei, more often than not, went hatless and turbanless and gave her fellow-men, to say nothing of those sister-women, the benefit of that exceptionally lovely head.

Now, as she sat curled up in her big arm-chair, her long lashes resting on her cheek, her arms folded, that hair, in the flickering firelight, spread darkly behind the pale beauty of her face. I watched her for a long time. How long had I known Lorelei, I wondered? About a fortnight, I guessed. The reading-room was very warm. The night outside was suddenly quite quiet. Her lips were slightly parted. My heart was very warm for her.

'Now, look here, Hyde,' I remonstrated with my second self, 'I simply will *not* have you kiss this girl. Behave yourself. How often have I had to speak to you!'

'Jekyll,' said my second self to me, 'you know darn well you can't stop me, and I know darn well you don't want to. Why not improve this shining hour? After all, you never know if you'll kiss a girl again, let alone one like this, with these air raids.'

'Reprobate, libertine, middle-aged fool,' I said angrily, 'you should be thinking of hair-aids, not of air-raids and this girl.'

'Now come, come, Jekyll,' said my second self, 'you can't bluff me. I know you too well. Kiss her, my lad, kiss her. This is where the dotted lines come in English literature.'

So I bent over her and kissed her hair, softly, and then her lips, very softly but rather long, and as I did this I found that she was not asleep, for her eyes opened gently and her lips returned my pressure, coolly but perceptibly, and then she disengaged and asked, strangely,

'Do you like me?'



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'Yes,' I said.

She looked surprised. Then she slipped one arm round my shoulders, drew me to her, and put her lips to mine again. That kiss grew warmer and warmer, like the rising sun. It lengthened and lengthened, like days in spring. When it seemed that we could not draw any closer together, we still drew closer together. I was surprised by her warmth and feeling. What, I thought, even in Birmingham? She was slight and supple, but very firm and strong. Beneath her jumper I could feel the engine of life and love beating, evenly and regularly at first, then faster and faster, then racing as if the throttle of passion had been opened wide.

Was it that same kiss, or some unnumbered other, how much time passed, how many dotted lines? I do not know, but all at once, from some forgotten other world a noise penetrated to my sub-conscious mind — the noise of a 'stick' of bombs dropping, one after the other, each nearer than the one before, thump, THUMP, THUMP, T H U M P, crash, CRASH, CRASH, C R A S H . . .

She gave no sign that she had heard: I held her tighter than ever. 'Hitler,' I thought, 'please don't bomb me now. I don't believe you *can* bomb me, but if I am wrong, if one of those things *has* my name on it, then 'please not now, not this time. Make it some other time. Just leave me alone for once. You have harassed me for years, you have kept me chasing about all over Europe, you have stolen my occupation, you have plunged us into war again and confined me to this island just when I ought to be doing my best work in distant lands. Now that I *am* here, leave me at least this moment, *bitte*. This is the only favour I shall ever ask of you. Heil, just this once, Hitler.'

And just as I thought that there was a terrific crash, and our kiss broke in two like a snapped violin string. The lights in the lounge, next door, went out, and we heard screams and the noise of frightened women running hither and thither. Glass and debris crashed into the street outside and the window splintered. There were shouts and cries. I looked at Lorelei, in the firelight. She was all right; she was sitting upright in her chair, with wide open eyes and one hand on her heart, looking at me. I felt myself; I was

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all right. We went out into the lounge, where candles were being lit. That was all right, too, save for some glass that had come down from the roof.

For a while nobody knew what had happened. Then they found that a bomb had struck the upper storeys and wrecked half a dozen rooms. There was much coming and going of firemen and air-raid wardens. Then the manager, steel-helmeted, came round, asking all guests to leave the hotel and go to another near by, because a time bomb was believed to have reached the basement and it might explode at any time.

'Come on, Lorelei,' I said, 'I'll take you home', and, for the last time, though I did not know this, we walked through blacked-out London together to Piccadilly. Lorelei had quite recovered her spirits. She took me down to her workshop, introduced me to the other girls there, who were sleeping on mattresses and camp-beds. She told them of our adventure, trucking and laughing as she did this, and in a few minutes everybody was laughing. They brewed us some tea and then, after arranging to meet her next noontime, I came away. She came to the top of the stairs with me.

'Good night, Lorelei,' I said.

'Good night,' she said, offering her cool lips, and we mended the violin string where it had been snapped.

When I came next noon Lorelei was there waiting for me, but her doorway, where she had danced, was no more, only an enormous and ugly heap of ruins.

'What, you too?' I said.

'Yes, what a night,' she said, 'just after you went. None of us were hurt, but the workshop is flooded now, so my beloved job, that I was so glad to get, has folded up on me. The chief doesn't know whether he will be able to start again somewhere else. All the other girls have gone home. That bloody Hitler.'

'Curse the man and his bombast,' I said, 'what are *you* going to do?'

'I'm going home, too,' she said, sadly, 'and I was so full of hopes when I came to London, only three weeks ago!'

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'Going home?' I said, 'home to Birmingham? When?'

'This afternoon,' she said, 'I've no choice.'

We looked at each other.

'Aber, meine Lorelei,' I said, 'but, my Lorelei. You are really going? Going home?'

She nodded.

I thought for a long time, looking down Piccadilly. She thought for a long time, looking up Piccadilly. Then I turned to her.

'Yes, of course you are,' I said, 'you've no choice. What time's your train?'

She told me.

'We've time for lunch and a news cinema,' I said, 'and then I'll take you to Euston.'

For the first time I did not enjoy a meal with her and as she had to go I was impatient for the time to pass. At last we were at Euston. I put her in a corner seat.

'Lorelei,' I said, 'you've a quarter of an hour before the train leaves, but I'm going now. I hate waiting-for-the-train-to-start good-byes, and this one would be quite intolerable. As it can't be sweet I prefer to make it short.'

She looked down at me from the window and smiled. 'Isn't it strange how alike we are,' she said, 'you spoke what I was thinking.'

'It's very rare for two people's minds and likes and dislikes and ideas to dovetail as perfectly as ours,' I said, seriously. 'I don't suppose you'll ever forget London in the Blitz, Lorelei?'

'Never,' she said, 'and you?'

'I couldn't if I tried,' I said, 'and this isn't my patter, which you like so much. This is real. I think you're lovely, and I don't mean just lovely, but lovely. To look at and to know. The best things in life, they sing, are free, but how difficult to come by! You've given me things that I couldn't have found in a shop, a book, a museum, a jewel case, a bank, an art gallery, a theatre—anywhere. Or rather you've given me all those, and more. You'll never know just how much you gave me in these few hours that we have had together. When I met you I was in a dark

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tunnel, now I'm in the open country again, and I know there's gold in them thar hills. You've enchanted these days and nights of bombardment. You made a bad, black hour into a gay adventure. While other people have been despondent and despairing, I've been happy and exhilarated, and I never laughed so much in my life as I have with you. I wish you could be reproduced in millions of facsimiles and distributed throughout this land, for we need you. I kiss your hands, which most richly deserve it, and I salute in you youth and beauty and courage and wit.'

'How lovely that sounds,' she said, smiling still.

'It *was* lovely,' I said, 'how lovely it was.'

' "Thanks for the memory", she sang,  
Of London in the Blitz  
And air-raids at the Ritz".

' "Of raiders in the sky  
Chasing me and Lorelei.  
'How lovely it was", ' sang I.

'Good-bye, Lorelei,' I said, 'we shall both think of you.'

'Both?' she asked.

'Both,' said I, 'me and Hyde.'

'*What?*' she said.

'Read the book, "*Jekyll and Hyde*" ' I said, 'for further information. Good-bye.'

'Don't say good-bye,' she said.

'So long, then,' said I.

'That's better,' said she.

'Lorelei,' I said, 'do one thing more for me before you go.'

'What's that?'

'Take that turban off and let me see your hair again,' I said.

She quickly unbound her turban, took out her comb, looked at herself in the mirror while she passed it through her hair a few times, then came back to the window. She leaned out, the comb still in her hand.

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'All right?' she asked.

'It's perfect,' I said, 'that's exactly how you looked. So long, Lorelei.'

'So long,' she said, 'take care, and God bless you.'

'God bless you,' said I, 'so long.'

## CHAPTER 2

### CAVERN IN THE TOWN

ONCE, before Lorelei went away, we went together to the East End.

A few weeks earlier, in the blackest and most fear-laden days of that summer, but before the air bombardment began, I had been down to the East India Dock Road and Silvertown to renew my acquaintance with conditions of which people whose lives were spent between Whitehall and Marble Arch were, so strangely, unaware.

I remember being confirmed in my despondency by the things I saw that day. How, I thought, could a country hope to survive which permitted these revolting hovels, these soul-killing streets, which allowed its children to breed, stunted in mind and body, in such surroundings? Nowhere in Europe, not even in the Balkans which had lain for so long under Oriental rule, had I seen such squalor.

Nowhere had I seen such faces. They were like caricatures drawn by an artist with a diseased mind. They were, as C. E. Montague wrote, gargoyles — gargoyles made more hideous because they were the faces of human beings, because a little life lurked in them, because a fleeting spark of what might have been intelligence sometimes gleamed in the corner of an eye, because, in a country ruled by patriots, those stunted frames could quickly have been lengthened and strengthened, those toothless gaps filled in, those gaping mouths and lagging chins closed and made firm, those lack-lustre eyes illuminated, those grey and parchment-like and sagging cheeks coloured and tautened.

Hogarth and Aubrey Beardsley and Honoré Daumier and Heinrich Zille might have collaborated to design these faces. They were nightmare heads seen in a distorting mirror. To this had we come after 900 years of immunity from invasion. This

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was the use we had made of the century of security which our victory over Napoleon and over the Kaiser had given us. This was the fine flower bred in the placidity and prosperity of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. This — and Jarrow — and the Rhondda — and Durham — and the slums of Sheffield — and the slums of Liverpool — and so on and so on.

This was freedom and democracy. The people who lived in these places were as free to live in them as any millionaire. None denied them the right, unless they were laggardly with their rent. The people who built them were equally free to build them. To have interfered with that right would have been to strike a blow at freedom; it would have been undemocratic.

On the day that we went about the East End Jerry had begun to unbuild what had been Jerrybuilt. Most of these houses would at any time have collapsed before a strong puff of wind, save that they all leaned against each other and thus found precarious support. But the explosion of a bomb shook them down in rows. The rotten bricks and crumbling mortar simply dissolved.

The East End of London, if I have not already indicated this, was at any time depressing to see, like many other similar places in the English cities and country. It always looked its worst on a grey and rainy day, when the mean streets looked their slimy and grimy meanest. Then the picture of grey and unrelieved gloom was even deepened, and this day when Lorelei and I went there was, by an unusual chance in that sultry summer, such a day.

But now there were, in addition, great craters and heaps of ruins everywhere, and if anything can look worse than a slum house standing it is a slum house bombed. It was a ghastly scene and the mind could then hardly envisage what the scene would be in another six months' time. In those days, when all was disorganization and confusion, it seemed too much to hope that a certain order would presently arise out of this chaos, as actually happened, and that the fury of the bombardment would slacken.

The streets were full of frightened people with staring eyes, hurrying to and fro and yet not knowing where to go. They were homeless, and none had thought for them. For years we had been

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talking about air raids and now that they had come, no preparations had been made — other than those, which were efficient, quickly to remove and bury the dead in scores of thousands.

In the event, the number of people killed was relatively small: human life was not so easily destroyed. But the number of people who had at a stroke lost their all — which was nothing more than a hovel to sleep in, but it was their all — was very great, and in distant Whitehall no forethought whatever had been taken for them. East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet. The Minister responsible had been to the right schools and university and had governed Bengal, but he was as remote from the cares and sufferings of these people as if he had lived on the moon. Here, again, was the great gulf fixed between the classes — between the money-groups — which was the curse of England and the cause of all evil. What could he know of the East End who only Bengal and Whitehall knew?

Now, as always in England, the catastrophe had to come before anything was done to avert it, the horse had to run away before the stable door was shut. The homeless and hungry thousands panicked about those ruined and dreary streets. None knew who was competent to look after them, or if anybody was charged to do this. In fact, nobody was — or everybody was.

The Government? The City Fathers? The parish? All overlapped and interlapped, and all began to pass the baby to each other. The destitute thousands could find neither food nor shelter. If any gave them a cup of tea, this was 'charity' — yet we were now 'all in the front line'.

Days and weeks passed before this vast confusion was gradually disentangled. In the meanwhile hundreds of destitute people, with their young children, were herded into schools and such places. These were no safer, indeed more dangerous, than the homes that had been destroyed, but here were big, empty rooms; the official mind could think of nothing better. No one man, no one body, had the 'power' to say: So-and-so-many hundreds of these people *must* be found quarters to-night in the villages of this-and-that, thirty miles out, and fifty omnibuses will be waiting at



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such-and-such a point at umpteen o'clock to take them there, and sufficient food for them on arrival must be requisitioned at the public cost. That would have been much too simple and quick. Instead, a long wrangle about 'powers' began between the innumerable authorities.

Thus the plight of these people, in an emergency long foreseeable and actually long foreseen, was appalling. But food and shelter were not their only anxieties, for themselves and for their children. There was also fear — for the next night. As soon as dusk fell, the sky would be full again of hum-hum-hum, bombs would be crashing down upon them. (One such bomb, inevitably, fell upon a school into which hundreds of these wretched people had been herded.)

Desperation began to breed among them. If they could not find homes and food, where should they, at least, find safety?

Long before the war it had been obvious that the deepest places available should be taken and organized for the reception of these hundreds of thousands, when the bombs began to fall. I had pleaded for this, before the war, in a book, *Disgrace Abounding*. Nothing was done but to begin digging trenches in the public parks. When the war had already been in progress a year, little more had been done.

The bombs had not yet begun to fall — there was still time to wrangle. So a long wrangle went on, for-and-against 'deep shelters'. London, in her ordeal, had one great advantage — the possession of a vast system of underground railway, the stations of which could quickly be turned, with a little organization, into safe and healthy shelters for scores of thousands of people. There were also many other suitable places — deep storage vaults, cellars beneath big buildings, and the like.

The official mind, formed on the playing fields of Eton, decided that there were 'insuperable difficulties' against the provision of 'deep shelters'. (There were not; those which were available were quickly taken in use, when the bombs began to fall, and if they had been withheld, heaven knows what would have happened in London, for, as I say, desperation was approaching the point

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of eruption when I visited the East End in those days.) Here, again, was the dead hand, that clammy grip that strangles all forethought and all energy in England.

What were the 'insuperable difficulties'? That the subterranean stations and vaults which lay ready to hand and needed obviously to be prepared were 'in private ownership', were 'private property'. My barber, a man of working class or near working class origin, once told me severely that the East Enders were only allowed to use the underground stations 'by the courtesy of the London Transport Board'. Here, again, was that appalling habit of mind, that class-against-class, Poplar-against-Pimlico, Whitehall - against - Whitechapel, Hampstead - against - Hammersmith feeling which still prevailed when, because the East End was being especially savagely bombed, we were 'all in the front line', had all 'found a new unity'.

If 'the rights of property' were the reason for those 'insuperable difficulties', the whole affair shows again, for the millionth time, how stupid this bogymen is of whom so many go in fear. The fugitives, when they stormed and took possession of these deep places, did them no harm — or if they did any, it was in those first days and weeks when nothing had been prepared for them. Later, when officialdom forced itself to realize that they could not be expelled and took some care for them, a certain order and some measure of human dignity developed there. The underground stations and the warehouses, when they come to be handed back, will be no whit the worse for having saved the lives and health of English people. Then why on earth?

It is to despair, as the French and Germans say. Can we never generate a feeling of each-for-all and all-for-each, can we never foresee or forethwart anything?

When the first fire bombs began to fall on London they set fire to every building they hit, caused enormous damage, were difficult to master, cost the lives of many firemen.

In Germany, years before the war, soon after Hitler's advent to power, as I wrote in *Insanity Fair*, the lofts and garrets had had to be cleared, by order, of all inflammable material. I, and many

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other newspapermen, reported that at the time. In England, as the years slowly passed, an 'Air Raids Precautions Department' was formed, somewhere.

Presumably it had no 'powers'. That is always the get-out. We shall hear the same when the slum-landlords begin to rebuild the slums, after this war, by all past experience.

Anyway, the official mind, in Whitehall, set itself firmly against 'deep shelters'. When the bombardment was in full fury it began to build 'surface shelters'; that is to say, stone coffins were built in the slum streets.

By all paper calculations, these *were*, of course, much better than the slum houses. One would not collapse if its next-door neighbour was hit, as the slum houses themselves were wont to collapse, having lost the neighbour they leaned against, the only thing that held them up. Unless a bomb actually fell upon you, you were safe in those 'surface shelters'.

But nothing ever betrayed more vividly the total lack of understanding of the people's mind that prevailed in the haunts of officialdom. First and foremost, these harassed East Enders wanted to be *quite* safe, and they knew they could only find complete safety deep underground. But apart from that, they wanted, if they were to take shelter at nights for months and years, to be able to sleep, and in those surface shelters the noise would not let you sleep. Apart from that again, they wanted, and had a right to, some minimum degree of comfort, and in these dark and narrow surface-dungeons, which the devil himself might have invented, there was no hope of any.

So, that day, we saw appalling sights. Though it was early morning, long queues of miserable people, clutching shapeless bundles, shivering in the rain, stood at the entrances to the underground stations, waiting for nightfall, when they would stream down into them.

The police, the world-famed London police ('Your police are marvellous!'), had been given no better task to do, in this, London's greatest ordeal since the Plague and the Great Fire, than to stop them from entering. But that was vain. When night

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came the people bought the cheapest ticket they could and just stormed the stations. Nothing could have stopped them. Good, that the attempt was never more than half-heartedly made. The 'insuperable difficulties' were quickly overcome.

For long enough, the scenes in these underground dens were beyond description by pen or portrayal by brush. A man might have put his hand over his eyes, rather than contemplate them. People lay huddled together, tiny children in their midst, on the platforms, under the railway arches, in the vaults. There was no food for them, unless some local priest militant foraged and found some and brought it to them. There was no heat or water. There was no place for them to relieve themselves in decency. There was no care for their health. Pestilence immediately began to crawl about and breed.

After so many years of warning and anticipation!

We came, that night, Lorelei and I, to a place I shall never forget. The slums had been bad enough; this was a thousand times worse. The slums had gone underground; the darkness, the misery, the insanitary conditions, the appalling lot of the children, the overcrowding, had been multiplied a thousandfold.

Right and left loomed great vaults, stacked with bales and cases of foodstuffs. All around, as far as the eye could see in the murk, lay and huddled human beings, of every age and, as far as I could see, of many races.

God knows how many people were there, packed together on the damp ground, made slimy by the dirt their feet brought in from the streets outside. I estimated, roughly, ten thousand or more. They excreted and urinated in corners, behind the mounds of encased foodstuffs; what else *could* they do. The stench revolted. Men muttered and brawled, women chattered, children whined and cried. You heard many languages, saw brown and yellow faces. People lay in the roadways that ran between the vaults, in the vaults themselves, upon the packing-cases and bales.

As the afternoon wore on the place became so full that you could not pack another sardine in. Outside others still clamoured to be let through.

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The line of police parted to let a woman pass who pushed a perambulator before her. She was a Jewess. A sudden outcry arose, 'What's she got in that "pram"?' Men went to her and pulled aside the coverings; there was no baby in it, only boxes and cartons. The men, and the women in the background, cursed her. 'Playing the mother-and-baby trick again, you bloody ——' they called. She chattered and gesticulated volubly. There was a tumult of exasperated shouting. Then the men, imprecating, turned away from her and she pushed and wormed her way, somehow, behind a wall and out of sight. We heard other men and women swearing at her, and then the noise dwindled to its normal pitch.

We stayed that night, Lorelei and I, sitting in a corner with our backs against a wall. I never knew a night in the trenches in France that I detested so much. My mind kept running back along the years and cursing at the futility of all this; how easily it could have been prevented. I swore so much that Lorelei gently urged me to cease. 'What's the use?' she said, 'it's all done now. Try and think of the future, and if you can't do anything about that.'

So I subsided and sat, watching the people around. I was astonished how well they slept, many of them. They lay on their backs, with open mouths, snoring, or on their sides, sleeping quietly. Others lay with wide-open eyes. Arms lay about in strange poses, like the limbs of dummies. Some of those faces of sleeping people looked like the faces of dead men I had seen. I had not before realized how sleep, like death, may sometimes deprive a human face of all dignity, make of it a caricature of the waking, living, alert, watchful countenance.

The din of the bombardment outside continued all night. These people took no notice of it. Here, they felt safe. Overhead reached story on story of massive concrete, firmly held by great steel girders.

Near me, like a flower in some garden of rank weeds, lay two lovers, a girl of seventeen or eighteen and a lad not much older. They lay on their sides, face to face, their arms flung about each

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other. They were oblivious of all around. They talked and smiled and laughed, she sometimes stroked his head, he sometimes pressed her to him, they kissed. She was a little pretty, he, with long, lank hair, had the indeterminate, half-rubbed-out features of a London street-boy, but his command over her gave him an exaggerated self-sureness. He was man, the master; she, his faintly patronizing, wholly submissive slave.

I half-turned and saw that Lorelei was watching them, too.

'Love goes underground,' she whispered, smiling.

'Yes, we're making London fit for Eros to live in,' murmured I.

The intolerable night passed laboriously and slowly, like an old man toiling uphill. It was fetid, stifling, vile — it was captivity, misery, impotent protest. The noise of people stirring and groaning, of men talking and women complaining, of children grizzling never stopped.

At last it was gone, that nightmare. Later, when people took charge who knew the needs of the common people, men like Herbert Morrison, who had grown up in the mean streets of my native city, women like Ellen Wilkinson, who knew from Jarrow the appalling state of degradation to which decent human beings can be reduced by inhumane or ignorant rulers, Ellen Wilkinson whom I had once met at the corner table of the Taverne in Berlin, when these people were given a chance there was a change that was almost miraculous.

Admission-tickets gave to each habitué of the shelters his or her rightful place; there was no longer need to wait all day in a queue and fight for a corner at night. Bunks were provided, so that the people might sleep. Brightly-clad women, in red and green dresses, came round with food and drink at modest prices. Doctors and nurses came to supervise the health of those miserable throngs, and the mortal danger of epidemics, which had been so near, was beaten back and perhaps, it is yet too soon to be sure, even destroyed. The children thus were saved.

An achievement which should never be forgotten; you cannot learn these things on the playing fields of Eton, if you stay there a century. There, you can only learn that all life is contained within

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a little exclusive, fenced-off park circumscribed by the names Whitehall, Pall Mall, Ascot, the 12th of September, Gentlemen v. Players, Cowes, Eton v. Harrow, Wimbledon. There, you may learn Greek, but you cannot learn English, far less Cockney. There, you cannot learn how to foresee a problem and prepare against it, not even if it looms as distinct as an approaching thunderstorm in a cloudless sky. When mortal need arises, you have to step back and let human beings who are quite alive master it.

Everything that improvisation could do was superlatively well done, when these new hands took a turn at the wheel. The results only show what could have been done by a little forethought.

In the deep shelters the scene of human misery and degradation vanished and was substituted, like a transformation scene in a pantomime, by one of fair dignity. The sleepers underground, feeling themselves cared for and safe, evolved a community life which they even came to enjoy. Many old or lonely people who had lacked 'some one to talk to' now found company deep down in the earth. Even entertainment, a radio or a singer, was sometimes provided.

The improvement was so startling in these places, which towards the end of 1940 had threatened to breed revolution and pestilence, that, contemplating them when the spring of 1941 approached, I told a companion, an American who professed still to be disturbed about them, 'Nonsense, there's no revolution here. These people are happy to be safe, to be able to sleep, and to feel that they are no longer outcasts, in the front line which we are all said jointly to occupy, but that they are being cared for, and their children. Indeed, a revolutionary spirit *might* arise among them when the war is over and they are required to leave these places, to come upstairs and go back to destitution. "What?" they'll say, "go away from here, where we have our friends, and where we are so comfortable? Not likely!"'

That is an exaggeration, but not a very great one. It is a tragic comment on the conditions in which these people lived before the bombs began to fall.

But on that night, when Lorelei and I visited the Enormous

## CAVERN IN THE TOWN

Room underground,<sup>1</sup> that great change for the better could not be foreseen.

The fate of the East End still lay in the hands of Eton and Harrow, by way of Whitehall, in the hands of men who knew nothing of it and were more remote from the poverty-stricken masses than they were from the North Pole. The Tory system very nearly bred disaster, in the East End; disaster was averted when, yielding only to the irresistible pressure of an imminent calamity, they brought in one or two people from outside-the-party-pale to help. The fact, and the menace, remain, that the system is still intact, that those outsiders have come into it. Have they noticed the bleaching skulls of past 'Labour Leaders' who trod that path, crying, as they entered that exclusive palisade, 'Every Duchess in London will want to kiss us to-morrow'?

As we came out into the ravaged streets, Lorelei and I, the dawn sky had cleared and the sun had one foot in the saddle. The heaps of ruins, still soaked with rain, were beginning to steam. People were poking about in them, trying to recover a stick of furniture or a quilt. With the memory of the cavern in the town heavy in my mind, I took her arm and we made our way westward.

<sup>1</sup> E. E. Cumming's book *The Enormous Room*, though written in the 1914-1918 war, and about a French prison, gives an uncannily true picture of the Enormous Room I spent that night in.



## CHAPTER 3

### SPIRIT WORLD

MR. MERRIBOY was my tailor, or rather he was one of my tailors, for which of them all actually made my suits, I never could just make out.

I was always received, when I walked into their establishment, by a gentleman of some elegance who had none of the outward and visible signs of a tailor. He welcomed me almost with open arms, and began to discuss cloths and patterns with me as if he meant to see the thing through to the last button, but then, at some stage in the proceedings which I never quite determined, he vanished, into thin air, I think, I never saw him go, and I found myself in the care of his deputy, who wore a tape measure round his neck, as who should say, now the real business of tailoring is about to begin.

But at a given moment — as far as I ever fixed it, it was when I crossed the threshold of the little room where the mirrors were, and the hairbrushes, and the headless horse which I always longed to ride, I never could make out what business that decapitated beast had there, and the fascinating half-finished uniform of the Costa Rican Ambassador — he too disappeared, and Mr. Merriboy materialized from somewhere. He, beyond doubt, meant business, for he had not only a tape measure, but he had his coat off, and he carried a spiky pincushion and a piece of chalk.

Mr. Merriboy usually stayed quite some time, but I had to keep an eye on him, or he, too, was liable to vanish and suddenly, where he had been, I would find yet another, younger man, who was wont, if I was not very careful, to remove my trousers, by some sleight of hand, and invest me, by another conjuring trick, in an embryo pair most frailly held together, and these fascinated me, because they reminded me of the only pair of trousers I ever made, an experiment which ended in disaster. Those, however,

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were not really trousers, but shorts and I made them, from the two sleeves of an old khaki jacket, for a game of football which was suddenly arranged, somewhere in France in the 1914-1918 war, between the Artists' Rifles, which then had the honour of my services, and the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Having cut off the two sleeves I found that, though they clothed my legs, there was a wide open space between which had to be filled, and, yielding to the counsel of a comrade who told me that a 'gusset' was needed, I filled it, patchwork-quilt-fashion, with many small pieces from the remains of the khaki jacket, but the first time I kicked the ball the whole contraption flew to pieces and I had to leave the field covered only in confusion.

The trouser man, when he had finished with me, would also retire and all the members of that college of tailors, together, would presently, in seclusion, produce a suit. Thus none of them ever stayed with me long enough for me to get to know him really well, but Mr. Merriboy stayed longest, so that I came to know him best, and through him I was introduced to the spirit world, and this was one of the most interesting experiences I had in London under fire.

I liked Mr. Merriboy. I wish I could avoid using the word 'Pickwickian' to describe his appearance, but I can't. He was portly, he had a chubby, pink face, a bald head with fringes of white hair, a jovially dignified manner, and twinkling blue eyes. He was friendly yet deferential as he fitted incomplete suits on to me and tore them off me again with loud rending sounds. He was of those men with whom you immediately feel at ease; they are to be found in all ranks, and they are the only ones who deserve the name 'gentleman' as I understand the word, but they are rare.

My conversations with Mr. Merriboy, in those days, usually turned upon the events of the night before, as was normal at the time, when some men were ultimately driven to wear in their lapels a button with the words 'I don't want to hear about your bomb'. I myself stopped talking bombs very early in the bombardment, but I am more experienced than most in spying and eluding bores.

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He was a constant source of cheer and reassurance to me in those times, when I did not know how fierce the bombardment of London would become and was not sure how the population would stand up to it. Mr. Merriboy, when I met him, was always as fresh as the morning sun and, though he was ready to talk about bombs, he clearly had no great respect for them and I could see that they were for him, not a dread menace, but just a new topic of conversation. I was charmed, and rather puzzled, at that time, to find a citizen whom they left so unperturbed, for the period of the Great Despondency lay only just behind us and I was still privily worried about the spirit of a nation which had so long been misled and misgoverned. All this made me resolve to find out more, if I could, about him. I wondered if he were an exceptional man or a typical one.

'Good morning, Mr. Merriboy,' I said one day, as he materialized from behind a mirror, 'noisy again last night, wasn't it?'

'Good morning, sir,' he said. 'Yes, we 'ad a lot of bombs round our way.'

'Did you?' I said, 'and yet you look fresh as a rose, as usual. You don't seem to lose much sleep. How do you do it?'

'Oh, we make ourselves comfortable,' he said, 'the only trouble is, we can't lie down.'

'How so?' said I. 'Do you go to one of the shelters, or what?'

'Oh no, sir,' said Mr. Merriboy, 'we 'ave an Anderson shelter in the garden, and we go there.'

'Just you and Mrs. Merriboy?' I said. 'But surely there is room for the two of you to lie full length beneath one of those corrugated half-moons?'

'Well, there's four of us,' said Mr. Merriboy, 'me and my wife and the gentleman who lives in the flat next door and his wife. We 'ave a corner each, and that doesn't leave room for us to stretch out, so we each 'ave a deck chair. It's quite comfortable.'

'The heck it is?' said I. 'I shouldn't have thought so. Can you sleep?'

'Oh yes, sir,' said Mr. Merriboy, 'we sleep very well. We talk first and eat something and sing. We 'ave very nice evenings.'

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'Very *nice* evenings,' I said, astonished. 'Well, you surprise me. You are the sort of man who would break Hitler's heart.'

Mr. Merriboy looked at me speculatively, like a man who wonders if he should impart a confidence.

'Well, sir,' he said, cheerfully, as he ripped here and pinned there, 'we 'ave plenty to employ our minds. We 'appen to be spiritualists. . . .'

And he told me, who listened enthralled, the strange story of Ah Sing, the Chinaman, and Um Bala, the Zulu, I think those were their names, and the part they played in thwarting Hitler's attempts to destroy Mr. and Mrs. Merriboy and the gentleman and his wife who lived next door.

It was fascinating. Gradually I realized that Mr. Merriboy enjoyed these nights in his little corrugated-iron shelter, that he looked forward to the end of his working day so that he should be able quickly to make his way homeward and resume his intercourse with the spirits where he had interrupted it the night before.

My interest was insuppressible. Mr. Merriboy saw this, and was gratified. One day he invited me to join the little company in the shelter. I went along. . . .

With an urgent throng of other homeward-hastening Londoners we poured out of Golders Green Tube Station, in the gathering dusk, and made our way, through this street and that, to Mr. Merriboy's little house.

The sirens had not yet sounded, the air was still empty of the drone that always filled it as soon as darkness fell, the guns had not begun to bark. It was that fear-laden twilight hour which, in those early days of the bombardment, set the nerves of the city quivering like a plucked harp-string. By day the people were bold enough, even then, and disdained to take much notice of bombs, but darkness, somehow, overwrought them. The night stretched so long before them — endless hours of uninterrupted bombing stretched in front of them before dawn would bring a respite.

Night after night the starlit sky lay crystal clear over London;

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never had the city known such nights, and the people asked if Hitler had found a way to master and control the weather. Fog, cloud and mist, the Londoner's old enemies, might now have been his friends — but they stayed away. I thought bitterly, sometimes in those nights, of the hundreds of times Germans, who had never seen London, had told me that they would not like to visit it because they knew it always to be shrouded in fog!

Through the streets hurried bundle-laden people, making for the shelters. The last buses rattled by; when the sirens sounded most of the drivers (in *those* days) would leave them standing and, with their passengers, would go to the nearest shelter.

Mrs. Merriboy kissed her husband and affably welcomed me and soon we went, the three of us, out into the garden and down the steps into the little metal-roofed retreat they had made. I squatted down between Mr. and Mrs. Merriboy's deck chairs. Mrs. Nextdoor, their neighbour, came in and was introduced to me and sat down in hers. Mr. Nextdoor was not yet home. The only light was from a dim lantern. We talked, quietly. The night outside was very still. Space certainly was cramped in that dug-out; I wondered how I should ever contrive to sleep. It was not cold, that was to the good.

Suddenly, without warning, Mrs. Merriboy began to talk pidgin English in a high, squeaky, sing-song voice.

'Ah Sing,' murmured Mr. Merriboy to me. (He had previously explained to me that Um Bala, the Zulu, did not speak English, so that they could not always understand what he meant, and on these occasions Ah Sing, the Chinaman, who spoke a little, acted as interpreter. This time, Ah Sing had come through first.)

'Jack, he coming round corner now,' squeaked Ah Sing, through the lips of Mrs. Merriboy, and silence fell again. We waited. A little later we heard footsteps and Mr. Nextdoor appeared in the entrance to the shelter, nodded agreeably to me, of whose presence he had been forewarned, and picked his way to his corner.

We all talked again, and then we drank some coffee and ate some sandwiches. It was very *gemuetlich*, very cheery and comfortable. There was an atmosphere of good companionship. I

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liked this. I had never thought the underworld of Golders Green could be so pleasant, I reflected. We sang. Mr. Merriboy had a fair baritone and Mr. Nextdoor a tenor, and they harmonized well, and their wives, too. They sang softly and agreeably. They sang 'Down Yonder Green Valley' and 'The Farmer's Boy,' and I joined in. Then, at my suggestion, we all sang 'There is a Cavern in the Town.'

There is a cavern in the town, in the town [I sang]  
Where none of us can quite lie down, quite lie down,  
But we'll talk and sing, 'mid laughter free,  
And, Hitler, we're not scared of thee—thee, thee, thee.

This was well received and enthusiastically sung, and while we were still singing it we heard, first faintly in the distance and then coming nearer, the banshee-like wail of the sirens—oooOOO O OOOooo, oooOOO O OOOooo, oooOOO O OOOooo. . . .

Then they died away and silence fell in the dugout. For a long time nobody spoke. Then guttural sounds came from Mrs. Merriboy's corner. This, as I knew from Mr. Merriboy's accounts, was Um Bala, the helpful Zulu.

'Oom-oom-oom-oom,' he went. It was a recognizable imitation of the sound of approaching aeroplanes.

'They're coming,' murmured Mr. Merriboy, 'where are they, Um Bala?'

Mrs. Merriboy was lying back in her chair, her eyes closed. We saw her arm rise and point vaguely eastward, towards London.

Another silence. Then: 'Whizz — OOMPH, whizz — OOMPH' came from the corner. It might have been the voice of a primitive man imitating the noise of bombs falling. 'Whizz — OOMPH.' We listened intently. We heard nothing.

'How many, Um Bala?' asked Mr. Merriboy's voice, in the gloom.

'Er — er — er — er,' came the guttural answer. It *might* have meant one-two-three-four.

'Four,' whispered Mr. Merriboy.

We listened again, for a long time, and suddenly the guttural voice came again, urgently, 'oom-oom-oom-oom,' and this time

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we heard an aeroplane, the rush of bombs and explosions, and in between Um Bala exclaiming whizz — OOMPH, whizz — OOMPH, whizz — OOMPH.

Then the sound of the aeroplane dwindled and all was still again.

After a while Um Bala broke in again, loudly and emphatically. I heard long gabbled exclamations, that might have been sentences, and Mr. Merriboy's voice asking questions, to which he received answers that he seemingly could not understand. It went on a long while. I could not follow this conversation between two worlds, but gathered that Mr. Merriboy was seeking information about the progress of the raid and that Um Bala was doing his best to reply, how many aeroplanes there were, where the bombs were dropping, and the like. The general purport seemed to be that Mr. and Mrs. Merriboy and their guests had nothing to fear. Um Bala was clearly our friend, and harboured no grudge on account of our Zulu War. I began to understand why those evenings in the shelter were so pleasant. Um Bala was a kind of air-raid warden on the other side, a spirit roof-spotter.

Um Bala had a great deal to say and I wished I could have understood more of it. But presently Ah Sing came to the rescue. His squeaky voice spoke through Mrs. Merriboy's lips, urgently trying to explain, in pidgin English, what Um Bala meant.

'He say,' excitedly exclaimed Ah Sing, while Mrs. Merriboy's arms pointed here and there, 'don't be afraid, my white chillun. He say, no bombs killum white chillun. He say, Gelman ailo-planes ovel Goldels Gleen Hippodlome, but many black boys pushum back', and Mrs. Merriboy's arms made violent shoosh-shoosh gestures, to show how those black boys in the air over Golders Green Hippodrome were shooshing away the raiders.

So, absorbed, we followed the course of the raid, helped by Um Bala and Ah Sing. I was fascinated. I think I never enjoyed an evening so much. But presently the tumult and the bombing died; this was one of the quieter nights. We sang a few more songs. The night was growing very late and space in the dugout was most confined. I did not want to deprive these good people of

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their chance to get a little sleep. I thought I should go. We sang the 'Cavern in the Town' again, and at the end I sat up and prepared to go, repeating the last lines of the song:

'Adew, kind friends, adew, adew, adew.'

'Oh, don't go,' said Mr. Merriboy, 'you've a long way to go and you can't get any kind of transport. We expected you to sleep here. Stay here.'

'I've made much adew about nothing, then,' said I. 'But thank you, I'd like to stay. I'm glad I came and if you can sleep with me using up so much room I'd like to remain.'

'Yes, do, of course,' they said, these kindly people. They settled back in their deck chairs and soon were asleep. I remained awake a long time, for I was not very comfortable, thinking of them and Um Bala and Ah Sing. Strange doings! What curious things happened beneath the earth in this tormented and beleaguered London, I thought. The reality was always different from the thing you expected. I would not have missed this night for anything, I thought. Then I, too, fell asleep. When I awoke Mrs. Merriboy and Mrs. Nextdoor were gone, to prepare breakfast. We went and ate it and then, bidding them good-bye, I set out for town with Mr. Merriboy and Mr. Nextdoor.

London was astir again. The fears that infested the night had vanished. It was a wonderful morning, all the bundle-laden and harassed people of the night before were cheerfully and busily resuming their workaday lives, going shopping, making for town. The milkman went his rounds, the buses plied, the sun was climbing into the sky.

A new day was come, and life went on. Here and there, on the way into town, was a new heap of ruins, and at each one I saw I wondered how many human lives had been destroyed with it. But the more houses that were destroyed, the more you realized how vast was London, how inextinguishable the human spirit. Mr. Merriboy was cheerful and vigorous, a well-rested elderly man going to his work, and so was Mr. Nextdoor. At Oxford Circus I thanked them again and bade them adieu.



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I wondered if Um Bala and Ah Sing were watching us. What tragedies and comedies this beehive London contained — and just where was the dividing line between comedy and tragedy? I turned with zest to explore a new day. At Oxford Circus there was a large crater where my shoeblack habitually had his pitch. I found him not far away, in a side street. ‘Good morning, sir,’ he said, ‘bombed aht, as you see!’

## CHAPTER 4

### BOMBS AND CAVIAR<sup>1</sup>

STUMBLING and groping through the darkness, which on moonless and cloudy nights made the shortest expedition difficult, because it hid rooftops and roadway, kerb and corners, so that I had to navigate by guess and by God, I came to London's air-raid shelter de luxe, the Atlantis Hotel. Feeling my way through its outer fortifications of sandbags and brick and darkened swing-doors, I passed in. Without was a dark, dead and deserted city; within was light, movement and that chattering sound which you may hear in certain departments of the Zoo or at a cocktail party.

The night life of London, during the first and worst period of the bombardment, was desolation. Few people went out, not so much that they were afraid, but because they could not get home. All the theatres, save one which gave performances in the afternoon, closed, and all the picture theatres shut at the coming of dusk. Many restaurants, from want of diners, also closed. A few doggedly kept open, and of these I liked best a French place which had little protection from bombs, but calmly carried on, each diner being greeted, as he took seat at his table, by a little card with the simple words: 'La Coquille will stay open for dinner, unless a bomb falls on the building'. This spirit I admired, and Lorelei and I had had one or two merry meals at that place.

At the other end of the scale were those restaurants which kept open because they were deep in the bowels of the earth and were thus natural air-raid shelters. To these, people came to eat — and to sleep afterwards; couch-beds were installed. There, different and more reassuring messages met the diners when they came to their tables, for instance, this: 'For the comfort and contentment of mind of our patrons, we have converted the Grill Room into the most invulnerable shelter in the restaurant world. In the

<sup>1</sup> With acknowledgments to M. K.

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event of a raid, diners are immediately transferred to the attractive floor below. Service proceeds as usual and the utmost security is enjoyed. Beneath where you sit is as fine a shelter as man can build — bombproof, splinterproof, blastproof, smokeproof, gasproof and boredom-proof. . . . Perfect air purity continuing 800 hours if necessary. Supplementary lighting and air conditioning should current fail.'

But on the night of which I write I went to the Atlantis.

This place was, in the early weeks of London's bombardment, the last resort of fashion, the last stronghold of cultured society. Almost all other places had closed, for lack of visitors. But the Atlantis had been built after the coming of Hitler and its founders, men of long foresight, had had it designed to withstand bombs. Innumerable stories of reinforced concrete rose above its lower floors, where the undaunted remnant of the world which tries so hard, so vainly, and at such expense to amuse itself still moved. The large windows of the ground floor had been bricked in on both sides — no gate-crashing, or window-crashing bomb could sneak in that way. Ramparts of sandbags had been erected outside the swing doors, so that the uniformed porters, standing in the street, were quite marooned. The Atlantis was bombproof, shellproof, blastproof, gasproof — everything but boreproof.

In the English countryside which I had visited, rich men seemed, by the fortifications they erected round their estates, to hope to shut out death himself.

In the Atlantis Hotel this *was* the aim.

I was surprised by the number of very old and ailing people who tottered uneasily about the lounge, for I always felt that increasing age should bring increasing contempt of death — with each year that passes you have fewer and fewer losses to cut when you meet that most intolerable of bores and most incorrigible of diners, whose importance, like that of so many of his earthly debtors, is so much exaggerated by the illustrated press, which always portrays this dullard as a vengeful skeleton with outstretched, grasping hand and fleshless grin beneath a monkish cowl.

'Life is a hideous thing in which nothing is certain but death,'

## BOMBS AND CAVIAR

wrote the beautiful Empress Elisabeth of Austria, who should have found life anything but hideous. The Atlantis Hotel sheltered many people for whom this certainty could not long be delayed, but they clung to the little time that remained to them like guttering candles reluctant to part with the flame that struggled to leave them; they reminded me of a madwoman playing with a wax doll in the delusion that this was her child.

Beneath those serried floors of concrete, behind those brick and sandbagged bastions, they felt secure, and did not notice that the bore they sought to elude was sitting at the next table, was coming across the lounge to speak to them. I could feel no compassion for them, only contempt, because they belonged to the people who, being always afraid of something, being always avid to be saved from something, and particularly from Bolshevism, had helped more than any others to make inevitable the war from which they now hid.

They had much money — and could buy nothing with it.

They had neither dignity nor sense. I knew other old people who quite clearly saw that they had less to fear from the bore Death than younger people, because their account with him was a shorter one, and who behaved accordingly. They were inspiring.

A comic and a pitiful scene — death, agrin, handing the teacups to the rich dotards who had come in to escape him. And all around *cocottes*, French and English, subalterns of the Guards, Jews, actresses,— the typical wartime congregation of a big hotel.

You could still eat caviar at the Atlantis, and you could hardly hear the bombs, unless they fell very near indeed; a red or a green light at the entrance told you whether any were actually being distributed as you ate and danced.

The same repugnant contrast that the last war had brought, that all wars brought — there, the young men fighting 'to make the world safe for democracy', 'to make England a land fit for heroes to live in', 'to overcome the forces of evil', to save freedom, honour and whatnot; here, the idle, inferior gang of war-racketeers and their hangers-on. True, we were 'all in the front line' this war,

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but the English front line had its first, second and third class compartment, like the English railways (did not one of these advertise a train 'which will call at Badminton to set down first-class passengers on notice being given by the passenger to the Guard at Paddington?').

I sat down and contemplated that curious throng.

Through the door came a young man I had once known abroad, he whom I suspected of imprisoning his moustache at nights behind a net fastened to his ears, who in one and the same breath had complained of the Socialist squandering of money upon tenements-for-the-workers in Vienna and about the high-cost-of-champagne at the Femina there; now, inevitably, he wore Guards uniform.

Past me perambulated four expostulating and gesticulating Jews, father, mother, son and daughter-in-law; from snatches of their conversation, which they did not trouble to hush, I gathered they were transmigrants from Holland, and the young wife was severely trouncing her husband because he had not succeeded in obtaining permission for them all to sail for America. 'Do you think I want to stay here and be bombed,' she snapped at him, angrily.

A woman who is among the darlings of Debrett came by, ghastly, haggard and grotesque; she encountered a young, Jewish-looking man and said, 'What are you doing for lunch to-morrow, Ernie?'; he slipped an arm round her waist and said, 'I don't know, darling, what would you like me to do?'

*Du lieber Gott*, I thought once more, here am I. . . .

A British Minister came by. I was sorry, for England, to see him in such company. Across the lounge two elderly women with lapdogs settled down for the night among cushions, pillows and rugs. An enormous, jovial American journalist, a friend of my Berlin days, came roaring up to me with the open-heartedness I loved in such men. He was very pleased with himself. He had just been writing, in a corner, a little satire upon this front-line life of London's moneyed few. It was a parody, called 'The night the bomb fell in Berkeley Square,' of the song, 'A nightingale sang in

## BOMBS AND CAVIAR

Berkeley Square'. It was terrific. I only wish I could reproduce it here. 'As others see us'!

In the distance I saw a lift pass downward with be-dressing-gowned figures inside it. They were bound for the deepest basement, where the Turkish bath had been turned into an air-raid-shelter-for-pashas.

Then, coming out of the restaurant, I saw a very old woman of the stage-duchess type, fat, ailing, bejewelled. As she passed through the door she tripped over the carpet and fell heavily on one knee.

With gasps of compassion and alarm the head waiter and two under waiters sped to her aid, raised her and turned her round, so that she sat on the floor. Moaning 'My knee, my knee,' she sat on the floor, in the middle of the lounge, for fifteen minutes. Another waiter brought brandy, a fourth water. A woman cashier brought smelling salts. A young man of foreign mien and the lounge-lizard type appeared, or was summoned, from somewhere and held and patted her hand. After a quarter of an hour she was lifted and carried to a sofa, lay upon it like a stricken soldier. Two other stage-duchesses came. One dabbed her hands with eau-de-Cologne, the other damped a napkin and bound it round her head. The table at her side was covered with bottles of scent, smelling salts and glasses. There were never less than three people about her. Outside, in darkest London, poor homes in mean streets were dissolving in showers of debris and clouds of dust.

The farce was still being played an hour later, when I got up and went. I passed through the ramparts into the dark street. I could dimly see the figure of the night porter. I could not see if he was still the same man I had once noticed, in daylight, to wear many many decorations. That was probably an Englishman. He opened doors.

I went home. The streets were empty, dark and eerie. I saw hardly a soul.

## CHAPTER 5

### COVENTRATION!

THE first few weeks of the air bombardment exhilarated me beyond measure. I felt that the invasion, now, really was at hand, must come at any moment, and I was exultant that we had had so much time, the whole summer, to prepare for it. That was more than I ever dared hope for, more than we deserved, and I knew that those few precious weeks, between the collapse of France and the beginning of the air attack, had enabled us to mend appalling breaches in the ramparts.

The ragged legions of Dunkirk had been reformed and rearmed. The coasts were becoming, every day, livelier with troops and pricklier with defences. The air force was growing. The country had been surveyed, from the air, for likely landing-places for German troop-carrying aircraft, and these had been made useless for that purpose by obstacles of many kinds. A great quantity of arms and munitions of all kinds had come to us from across the seas, and our own home war production, gaining impetus at long last, had produced much more.

Under the new leadership of Mr. Churchill a new spirit fired the country, which now for the first time looked like a nation grimly and doggedly preparing to fight to the last. Up to the moment when he took charge, it was apathetic and bemused almost to the point of ignominious collapse, and none who live in quiet villas, where tea was served at the same hour and with the same cake all through that desolate time, where no sound or inkling of what was afoot or impended ever penetrated, need bother to challenge me in this, because I travelled the country far and wide and *know*.

But the miracle worked in June by those four factors — the English Channel, the Air Force, the Navy and Hitler's obsession with the glittering prize, Paris — had given us a few weeks to mend

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the worst gaps, and now, in September, when at length he was ready to launch the invasion, as I was convinced, we had a good fighting chance. At the worst, we could now no longer go down as France had fallen, almost without striking a blow in our own defence.

Now, for the second time, as the weeks wore on and no invasion came I began to grow puzzled again — *for I thought it must come.*

Why, then, was Hitler delaying. Failure either to attempt it, or to succeed in it, was for him in the longer or shorter run, defeat, complete, implacable, inevitable and irretrievable. I knew that, though few people in England could understand it; every German knew it. So why, why, why, came he not?

To-day, many people who know much of the truth believe that the invasion was prepared in those early days of September 1940, when the air bombardment began. They believe that it had to be postponed because of the heavy toll which our air fighters took of the German airmen. They believe the attempt then failed, or had to be postponed, because the first condition of success — the destruction of our front-line defences, our fighting aircraft — failed, and failed badly.

Day by day our fighters knocked the German airmen down in scores. On September 15 alone they destroyed more than 200 enemy machines. Hitler paid the price of looking-both-ways in June, of forgetting, in his preoccupation with Paris, that we still had a small force of air fighters.

At that time, it was *very* small, that remnant. If he had turned on us then, he would almost certainly have smashed it by overwhelming superiority of numbers. In *quality*, true, it was better than his. But in September, when he struck, it was very much greater in *quantity*, too. The chance had been lost.

If, in June, he had forced us to send up that small reserve of our metropolitan fighter force which, as Mr. Churchill revealed, we always refused to send to France, and if he had destroyed it, England would have lain open to him. I do not see how, in our condition of that time, we could have withstood him. A catastrophe which even history cannot match would have come.



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This is the view of many people who know the inner history of those days. I know the head of our air force shares it: I have told the story. His officers at that time used to look questioningly at him when he came into the mess, try to read in his face the portents of disaster, and they were reassured by his complete unconcern, by the way he would call for his usual glass of sherry, by the cheerful way he would chat to them. I was not among them, but I remember him during the retreat in France in March and April 1918, when matters also looked sufficiently black, and I can picture the scene. Some weeks later, when he was promoted from his then command of the bombing aircraft to the command of the entire air force, he said to them: 'I can tell you now that there were days when I came into this mess almost believing it was all up. We know now, of course, that those days can never come again. But your cheerfulness and bearing helped me then more than you can know.'

If this is the true picture of what happened in the summer months of 1940, and I think it may be, then the decisive battle of this war was fought in those months, and won in September, by the English Channel, once again, and by the Royal Air Force — by its fighter pilots, by its ground staff, by the eight machine guns that its fighters carried, and by the extra mile of speed and the extra ounce of quality which the designers had put into those aeroplanes.

The history of war can seldom have seen a narrower shave, seldom have seen an impregnable citadel more nearly thrown away.

At that time, in September and October, the storm of events raged too loud about our ears, the picture was too near to our eyes, for that to be clear. At any rate I, for one, could not then dare to hope that even our magnificent victories in the air — still the only gleam of light in the dark sky — were sufficient to account for the continued delay in the invasion.

And as it still did not come, I began again, while jubilantly thanking our stars for every day gained, to worry about the reason. There was something in all this which I could not understand — and, knowing Hitler, Göring, the German military machine and

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the almost sexual German lust for the destruction of England, I feared that which I could not understand, greatly. I still fear it to-day. That explanation about our air victories is good, but I have a feeling in the pit of my stomach that it is not quite good enough.

So, as September passed, and October, and November came, and the air bombardment continued but still no invasion came, I began to ask myself, 'Why does he not *bomb* us?'

That may seem a strange question, but it is not. By that time it had become clear that all the bombing would hardly more than scratch London, it was too sporadic. It would not kill the spirit of our people, but only toughen it, and it would not hamper our war production or damage our defences to any mortal extent. Why, I asked myself, was Hitler not doing to us what he had done to Warsaw and Rotterdam?

The answer came in November, when Coventry was 'coventrated'.

This hideous word 'coventration', whether the Germans win or lose this war, will retain its place of high respect in the German language. I would advise people to bear this in mind if, after this war, the flatulent babble about 'not humiliating the Germans' and 'not trying to keep Germany down' (Sir Neville Henderson's words, inevitably) begins again.

Of all sad word of tongue or pen, 'civilization' is the saddest. A man who goes about the world grows very sparing in its use. If he judge by what remains, the Dark Ages reached a higher level of civilization than our own. If he look at the old buildings in such a town as Chester, and compare them with those of to-day, he must needs ask himself why civilization, if that is in truth what we are fighting for, seemingly means to move backward. If he go to Athens, and conjure up before his mind's eye, from what remains of it to-day, that uniquely beautiful bygone time of physical beauty and mental enlightenment, of white robes and white temples and dancing virgins and processional ways and striving athletes against a blue sky and blue sea, he may think that no answer exists.

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Of bombs — which in those days were shot from mortars, not dropped from the air — Evelyn, writing in the year 1694, said: 'This manner of destructive warfare was begun by the French, is exceedingly ruinous, especially falling on the poorer people, and does not seem to tend to make a more speedy end of the war, but rather to exasperate and incite to revenge.'

That is true, to-day, of bombs; the lives they destroy, the homes they ruin, are to-day, as they were then, in overwhelming measure those of poor people. It *was* also true, by the way, of the French, who at that time were the virile, vigorous, bicep-feeling and bound-breaking people of Europe. It was not wrong, not un-Christian, to check and harm them, nor is it wrong or un-Christian to-day to check and harm the Germans, who in the last two hundred years have taken their place. The only wrong and un-Christian thing is to neglect the opportunities which this, our great function in European history, gives us to civilize England, to fall back each time, from a sense of physical danger averted, into a stupor of mental inertia and inactivity, into a Rip van Winkle-like trance.

When Coventry was coventrated another of my questions was answered. Now, I thought, Hitler was at least trying to do something that could be understood. He was striking at our war production, trying, by bombing on the Rotterdam and Warsaw model, to strike terror into our minds by sheer weight of explosive.

The bombing of Coventry was, and did at that time seem, a very terrible thing. I knew people, who had been among the most incorrigibly optimistic and ostrich-like of soothsayers until the war came, and even during the first appalling nine months of it, people who thought the war would win itself if only we left it to Mr. Chamberlain, who now completely lost their nerve, and even told me that 'Hitler can have Britain on its knees and begging for peace within a month if he goes on like this', people who fled to distant peaceful cities and country resorts.

Indeed, I, a prophet at home, now encountered again the fate of such bores. Before the war I had counted as an irresponsible Red, alarmist, warmonger, defeatist, extreme anti-Nazi and the like — because I had said that war was coming and that we were

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in mortal danger of being beaten. Now that I saw that our prospects were actually improving every day, far beyond my rosiest hopes of the first twelve months, I came to be looked on as an irresponsible optimist and *jusqu'aboutist*.

I well remember speaking on two occasions, one before the war began and one when it had been in progress some fifteen months, to groups of officers. On the first occasion, they were but languidly interested in my opinion that it would come, and very soon; they did not believe this, and were just bored by the view that, if it came, we might lose it. The second group, fifteen months later, in so far as it expressed any criticism, criticized my most optimistic view about our hopes of victory, the main objection being 'How on earth are we to regain a foothold in Europe and drive the Germans out?'

It was perplexing to me, in speaking on many occasions to soldiers, to find that the most intelligent questions about the war and Europe were wont to come from private soldiers and non-commissioned officers.

(Incidentally, some enlightenment is to be derived, by the discerning, from the most curious thing that ever happened to me in the way of criticism. The Communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, gave a fairly favourable criticism to the first of these three books, *Insanity Fair*, save that it condemned the stupidity of my references to the Communist régime in Russia, a country with which, I insisted, we must ally ourselves if war was to be averted. In the next book, *Disgrace Abounding*, I still argued that we needed that alliance with the country, Russia, and still expressed my dislike of the ruling racketeers there, the Communist régime, but in this book I also criticized the Jews. The *Daily Worker* violently attacked this book, and offered to take 'a small bet' that within a year I should either have repudiated it or have joined a Fascist organization. Within six months, in the event, the *Daily Worker* had gone Fascist and was in effect, by the opposition to the war which it preached after the ruling racketeers in Russia had befriended themselves with the ruling racketeers in Germany, an ally of Hitlerist Germany.)

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But back to Coventry. When that town suffered its ghastly ordeal on November 15th, it *did* look as if Hitler had found a weapon that might cripple us and beat us down. He made similar attacks on many other cities. I saw them all.

Terrible devastation, yes. The centre of Coventry, with the cathedral spire still standing, looked astonishingly like ruined Ypres, with the skeleton of the Cloth Hall, in the last war. Here the Germans *had* obliterated almost everything—in a small section of the town, and that not vital, or even closely related to our war production.

For eleven hours the Germans had ceaselessly poured fire and death and destruction upon those stricken, imprisoned people. Not long before the good Methodists, somewhere in Britain, had been devoutly discussing 'What will Hell be like?' They should have been in Coventry: they would have known.

For the first time, in this country, people knew what the Poles and the Hollanders and the Belgians and the French, in the frontier district, had suffered. Benumbed and terror-stricken, bewildered and fearful, the townspeople poured away from the town, next morning, to seek the shelter of hedges and ditches — anything was better than another night in Coventry. San Francisco or Tokyo, and their earthquakes, were not worse. Behind them the fires still burned.

Within a few days they were back again. Placards on the ruins told where shopkeepers had resumed their trades. The name-plates of teashops were dug out of the debris, suspended from poles, and beneath them travelling teashops, on wheels, sold the same cakes and pies. The streets were gradually cleared, essential services mended. In the streets great brazen voices, from the police cars or the vans of the Ministry of Information, told the homeless where to find food and shelter. Not all the dead, perhaps, had been recovered from the ruins; but life resumed its course above them.

It was the same everywhere I went. Sheffield had had such a night of horror; the Moor, Fitzalan Square and other places had been coventrated. That had happened but a few hours before,

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and the taximan who drove me in from Hull, and had not seen any air-raid damage before, flinched at the sight. None yet knew just how many people had been killed, but where a shop had been left standing, even if the windows were gone and the wind blew the dresses in them about, business was carrying on; in mean streets — and the slums of Sheffield are ghastly — rows and groups of houses had been destroyed, but the womenfolk refused to leave their men in those, next door, which remained standing. A great factory had had all its windows blown out by concussion but was otherwise intact, and announced, in great letters, 'Yes, we are blasted well open'. A chimney or two was idle, but forests of others still smoked, and my taximan, as we drove away again and looked back over that great black smudge of a town, said, reassured, 'Um, there 's a lot still standing, isn't there? He'll have to live a long time if he 's going to destroy all that'.

Wallasey and Bootle, the bedrooms of Liverpool, had suffered badly, and the city itself, too, but all you saw, everywhere you went, was men busy repairing that overhead cable, that gas-main, that window, removing the debris. A bomb had blown out the back of the Adelphi Hotel, of which I had often heard but which I had never seen before, yet the New Year, that year of cruel ordeals and great hopes, 1941, was gaily ushered in in the front of it.

On New Year's Day I went to a theatre, outside which a bomb had fallen but a few nights before, and the comedian raised his biggest laugh of the evening by telling the jest of an innkeeper who, hearing a bomb coming straight for his inn, called to his guests, 'Drink 'em up, gentleman, the next one's on the house'. And in the stalls peacefully slumbered and snored a man who had seemingly coventrated too much good food and drink on New Year's Eve; nothing could disturb him.

The picture was the same everywhere. Bristol had had some streets coventrated, but the bombs had not made the leaning tower of the old church there fall; an emblem of human fallibility, perhaps, but still of human strength, it mocked the devastation all around.

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Southampton had had more than one night of terror, but though parts had been destroyed the old Bar Gate still stood, the wreckage was being cleared, the shattered clocks were being mended and all their hands set to twelve o'clock, ready to start ticking off the seconds of new days and weeks and years and centuries. The people who, like those of Coventry, had trekked out into the neighbouring countryside, rather than face other such nights, were most of them back, arranging to reopen their businesses elsewhere.

Manchester, Birmingham, Mother London — all showed the same picture of senseless and ineffective destruction.

'Coventration,' as I was able to satisfy myself in that long tour, was a failure. The spirit of the people, far from being broken, was not even dented. True, a factory here or there had been hit, but the sum effect of the damage to our war production was far less than any man might have feared.

The net result of Coventration, indeed, was, with one exception, exactly that described in Evelyn's words of 1694: 'This manner of destructive warfare . . . is exceedingly ruinous, especially falling on the poorer people, and does not seem to tend to make a more speedy end of the war, but rather to exasperate and incite to revenge.'

The exception lies in the last passage. I could not, to *my* exasperation, find much active exasperation or desire for revenge, among the people of coventrated England.

There was a wish that Germany should receive as good as she had given, but there was no real exasperation, either with the Germans or with our own leaders who had allowed the war to come about and find us unprepared.

The dominant feeling was one of passive doggedness. The remark I most often heard was, 'He's wrong if he thinks he can beat us like this'. People seemed to think that, just by being bombed, they were helping to beat Hitler.

This I thought ridiculous. I had a good deal of hatred for Hitlerist Germany in my heart and found this state-of-mind neither reasonable nor Christian. I would have liked to see much more

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resentment, much more clamour for quick and strong measures to hasten Germany's defeat.

It is the strangest of paradoxes, that the Englishman's worst qualities, in peace, are in a way his strongest qualities in war, that they may win us this war.

His philosophy is the simple one of 'Stick it', and he seems to act upon it at all time and in all situations. 'Stick it' when the bombs are falling is certainly good, as far as it goes, and Hitler would have been a despondent man if he could have sat alongside me in that Liverpool theatre and listened to the joke about 'The next one's on the house': this is the immovable state of mind, seeming to promise more than it actually contains, which once reduced a German prison camp commandant at Ruhleben, in the last war, to frenzy; contemplating the English prisoners ranged before him one day, he jumped up from his table, threw his cap on the ground, and with beet-red face, stamped round the room roaring 'These damned, self-satisfied English faces. I don't like them and I won't stand them!'

But 'Stick it' applied to slums, derelict areas, the breeding of half-wits, misgovernment, and foreign policies of the kind we pursued in the between-war years, is lunacy.

These things *lead* to wars, and leave you unready to fight them.

It is, in the last analysis, a philosophy of inertia, inaction, fear of exertion, and don't-bother-about-anything: there always will be wars, there always will be slums, there always will be rich and poor, we'll-muddle-through-again, we-always-lose-every-battle-but-the-last, and if you give 'em a bath they put coals in it.

That is why I would have liked to find real anger, real bitterness, real exasperation, at any rate some active emotion or feeling, in the coventrated towns. The 'stick-it' philosophy, in the end, means that a man should watch an invasion passively.

Coventration, I repeat, was a failure, from almost every point of view. The towns I saw had been badly damaged, yes, and many people killed. None of them had been devastated like the French front-line towns in the last war, say, Albert or Arras, where civilians still stayed. The citizens of these coventrated



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English towns had become used to living in conditions of siege and beleaguement — but these conditions were, in truth, not so bad as they seemed, because there were always long respites. The actual loss of life was surprisingly small, compared with the anticipations.

Contemplation of these cities prompted some strange reflections. First, that the German airmen, in spite of the black-out, could seemingly find any town they liked, when they wanted to, and pick out a certain district in it — but then, I have already discussed the demerits of the black-out, which is the friend, rather than the enemy, of the night raider.

Second, that the Germans used this possibility in a very strange way. They did not, on the whole, bomb the things they should have bombed if they wished to further their chances of winning the war. Surprisingly often, they visited main shopping streets, which they destroyed — to what end, heaven knows — with amazing and uncanny accuracy.

I have seen streets where a German soldier might have walked along afoot, casting great bombs right and left into the buildings on either side: there were neither craters in the roadway, nor were the buildings behind seriously damaged.

What on earth were they at? Why did they do this senseless thing? Somebody may know, I do not.

Incidentally, it was a revelation to me to find how closely the main streets of our cities, nowadays, have come to resemble each other. None has any individual character left; of none could you say, this could belong to no other city than Manchester, this, if I were dropped here by parachute, I should immediately know to be Sheffield. In every one the same shops stood side by side — somebody's red-and-gilt chain store, somebody else's cheap tailors, somebody else's white-and-gilt teasop, yet another somebody's mass-produced-cheap-frocks-for-women.

A good deal of the damage and a good deal of the suffering might have still have been saved but for the incorrigible English fault — dilatoriness and apathy. Even with the example of London before their eyes, some of these cities were taken unawares

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by coventionation. I know of a town hall that was burned down because the town council had not thought to have sand at hand.

But on the active side of the balance was something of which far too little has been said. Indeed, the historian of the future will be deeply disappointed if he searches the British Press for a day-by-day account of heroism and cowardice, of ordeal and survival, or of death and rescue.

He may find lurid accounts of 'The Battle Of Britain', hugely advertised, built-up and distributed, by 'a famous American writer who spent ten days in Britain'. He will find perplexingly sparse descriptions, by native writers, of the stupendous day-by-day story of these times, of the epic feats of the men who removed the bomb that threatened to destroy Saint Paul's, of the amateur firemen who stood and fought the flames on swaying, unaccustomed ladders while bombs fell all about them, of the bus-drivers who imperturbably steered their great vehicles through pitch-dark streets with death snatching at them on every side (I met with a curt refusal when I asked for permission to accompany one of these men on such a trip), of the volunteer ambulance drivers and rescue parties and air-raid wardens.

These *were* heroes. When this war is over their experiences should be collected and published. If they are not, that is a criminal gap in the documentation of London's history, of the history of the other bombed cities. I knew of men who appeared at their desks in the morning, alert and fresh, after nights in which they had earned, though they would never receive, the highest decorations for valour that could be devised; I personally am not interested in these trinkets and shall always be satisfied to emerge from any war in which I am concerned without a little white cross, but if they must be, these men should have them.

I never felt my faith and hope in England beat and surge again so high in me as on a night in London during the worst air raid that city had. I stood at a dark corner with a good friend, an Austrian girl whose faith in England had never faltered even when mine sank deepest. She saw in England the last hope for the

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world, and she had a prescient, unshakeable, almost mystic conviction that this hope would be fulfilled.

'Trust to these people', she always told me, in the darkest hours, and when I objected, 'The people? What can they do against such leadership?' she would answer, 'Don't worry, you'll see. These people cannot be beaten'. So she spoke to me in April and May and June of 1940. She saw in England the hope of free men, the liberation of enslaved men — and the liberation of her homeland, for which her heart longed.

Now we stood at that dark corner amid an infernal din. She had never been in an air raid before and was quite fearless. There was not a sign of life among all those signs of death.

Suddenly, a shape dimly distinguishable in the blackness, a London omnibus lumbered slowly round the corner, passed us, and continued on its way, as if this were a spring morning. We faintly discerned the form of the driver.

'Look at that,' she said, 'and think of that simple man, doing his duty without thought or hope of reward or recognition. That is England, and that is why you will win, in spite of everything.'

I looked at her and thought of the concentrated cities, of the detestable sloth of those between-war years which had caused their plight, and then I looked after the bus.

'I believe you're right,' I said, 'but if you're right, that's why you're right. Anyway, I salute you and him.'

## CHAPTER 6

### PORTRAIT OF A LADY

ON Christmas Eve of 1940 I drove through long and lonely roads of Hampshire, Dorset, Somerset and Devon, thinking how unlike Dingley Dell and the Christmas cards my Christmases were.

Dreary London, before and after the first war called Great. Trenches and billets in France and hospital at Brighton, during that war. Berlin, before and after Hitler. Vienna, waiting for Hitler. Chust, in far Ruthenia.

What a queer lot of festivals, I thought, looking back. Nearly always on the move, always asking myself what the next move would be, what the future would be. I wondered if I should ever know a Christmas of the peace-and-plenty, robins-and-snow, God-bless-us-all, funny-hat-and-cracker kind. The only ones I thought of with pleasure were the last one in Vienna, which was lovely, and the very strange one in Chust.

What a lonely country England is! It is, I believe, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, but I had often been astounded, driving about, by the emptiness of it, by the interminable stretches of road on which you saw no soul, nor on either side of it. Where were the people who worked this land? Were they hiding behind the hedges and fences?

I missed the groups of peasants, bending and toiling in the fields, leaning against the wind as they plodded their homeward way. I missed the bustling life of the villages; in other countries, you felt that you came into a community, when you entered a village, here you only saw a few individuals. I missed the busy traffic round the inns. Here the inns were nearly always closed. For hours at a time a man could find no place to halt for a minute, to refresh himself and talk a little, to enter for a moment into the life and thought of the people he saw. Here he could only pass through, as alone and alien as if he had been a visitor from Mars.

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I felt like a fly crawling over a map, not like an Englishman driving through England. How valuable and invigorating, I constantly thought, had the moments been to me, in other lands, that I had spent, halted on the way, in some country inn or market place. Where was the England of Dickens's journeymen, the good cheer and good company they found on the road, the cheerful innkeepers, the bustling and lively maids? Had they ever existed? Here was a cold and unpeopled countryside, closed against and indifferent to the traveller.

I saw in front of me a town with a good silhouette, the kind of town that always, in other lands, had stepped on the accelerator of my interest and fancy, quickened my desire to be in it, to make the acquaintance of the people, to talk and eat and drink with them, to ply them with questions and to answer theirs, to delve quickly into its history and character, before I should take my seat again, press the starter, and continue on my way.

It was Borechester. The streets were full of people, shopping for Christmas — full, I afterwards found, because at one o'clock all the shops closed, and then the streets suddenly became empty and lifeless. These streets were quaint and caught the imagination. There were inns, built in an older time, that seemed to bow towards the traveller and say to him, come to us, we are here to refresh you at all times, we are here to serve you at any hour, here you will find good food and good drink and pleasant company and a bright fire, and, above all, this is Christmastide, come in, you are most especially welcome at this season.

It was noon, and I was cold and hungry, and had a long road before me. As good a place as any to break my journey and my fast, I thought. The scene is a lively one and promises well. I halted my car, got out, and went to explore Borechester.

I am never sure at what hour a man may drink, under the lunatic rites that prevail in England, and I was glad to learn, when I entered the most open-armed-looking of those inns, that if I waited only another minute I might have my glass of sherry. The barwoman and I waited, both with our eyes on the clock. As it ticked off the last of those sixty seconds she poured out my sherry.

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I contemplated her. She looked careworn, as if she had some secret sorrow, and her speech and dress were both of the most daunting refinement. To receive a glass of liquor from her was like receiving Maundy Money from the King. I asked if I might have something to eat. She looked at me as if she had not understood me. 'Don't be angry,' I said, gently, 'after all, it's Christmas Eve'. Not an eyelash fluttered, nor was the surface of the shallow pools which were her pale-blue eyes rippled by any stir of interest or understanding. 'Oh, lahnch,' she said, 'lahnch is served at one o'clock.'

Noon had just struck. I went out and visited another hospitable-looking inn. There, too, lahnch was served at one o'clock. I went to an ample-bosomed hotel, which looked as if it ached only to console me. I did not know whether the large black woman in the little office was more startled or resentful when she saw me come in. She told me that lahnch was served at one o'clock.

Now, at last, I understood. In Borechester lahnch was served at one o'clock.

I had not so much time to spare. I could see that the friendly approach, the simple explanation of my case and my wants, which would have overcome all difficulties, if any such had been conceivable, in other lands, would avail me nothing with this woman. Her whole philosophy of life had been shaken by the suggestion that any one might want lahnch before one o'clock, and she was still quivering from that shock.

So I assumed a loud and arrogant and impatient voice and said I had little time and must have something to eat, and, a little taken aback, she said I might go to the head waiter 'and see if he could do anything'.

Him I found and he too, emerging from the remoter gloom of an enormous dining-room, came towards me and listened to me with the antagonistic air of a Trappist monk forced to break his vows of silence. But he said, reluctantly, that in ten minutes he could 'do me' some cold meat, though he had no potatoes, and I went to spend the ten minutes in the bar, watched malevolently by the wardress of the office as I passed her.

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In the bar an officer in uniform and two men in raincoats stood awkwardly about and exchanged brief remarks in tones of great embarrassment, which seemed to be made acute by my entrance, so that they fell into silence, their eyes on their shoes. As I drank my sherry I said, in a loud voice, suddenly, 'The compliments of the season, gentlemen', and went out, chuckling inwardly; I could feel their panic-stricken eyes follow me.

In the dining-room a surprise awaited me. The waiter gloomily did me, not only the cold meat, but also some potatoes. The Christmas spirit was abroad. I lunched with appetite. While I was eating some one else put a deprecatory head through the door and, seeing that I had food, ventured in. After a while I looked up and across at him. He was a parson, of what denomination I do not know. But he was smiling at me.

This almost unnerved me. The idea that he might want to exchange agreeable conversation did not occur to me. It could not, in Borechester. I thought he was after my soul and that was all I had left, in Borechester.

But in fact that was what he wanted. He was a most pleasant man. He seemed unhappy in his surroundings and told me that unless a man hunted and shot and fished he was of little account in those parts. I gathered that if a parson wished to save the souls of the local inhabitants he needed to kill things in their company, otherwise they preferred not to be saved.

He knew Germany, too, very well, and spoke of something I had also noticed, of the resemblance between England and Germany in one thing — the greater friendliness of the Rhinelanders in Germany and the Southerners in England, and the colder unfriendliness of the Prussians and East Prussians in Germany and the Northerners in England.

This is true. I found no great warmth towards strangers in the South of England, but what I found was open-hearted neighbourliness compared with the atmosphere in the North.

While we talked one o'clock, lunchtime, approached, and a third man crept stealthily in and seated himself at another table. A lady followed, whose ambition in life seemed to be to forget the

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world and be by the world forgot. She was tall, but seemed much taller than she was, so high did she elevate her long thin nose, so exquisite was the pallid haughtiness of her mien, so perfect was her self-containment. After her came one of the most remarkable women I ever saw. She must have weighed nearly a ton and wore some martial uniform. Her demeanour was grim. She was followed by four bashful subalterns.

That was the entire company, scattered about the great room, through which the waiter morosely stole. My parson now proved himself a lesser man than I had hoped. The feeling of the room was too much for him. He subsided into a guilty silence. Determined to rally him, I tried to resume our conversation. The languid lady and the grim lady raised their heads and gazed, the one in shrinking reproof and the other in glowering hatred, towards us. My parson looked at me in a scared way, muttered 'Yes' or 'No', and bent his head to his plate. The four subalterns whispered fearfully together in a far corner. Silence fell, save for their hushed murmur.

Well, well, God bless us all, I thought to myself, and, having paid my bill with as much noise as I could, I shouted 'Merry Christmas' to the parson, clapped him on the back so that he nearly choked from embarrassment, dashed out, got into my car, and tore out of that town, where the streets were now quite empty, as fast as I could, on over lonely moors, through winding lanes, through Axminster, where I supposed that carpets still were made, through Honiton, where one little shop still supplied lace-for-tourists, to Exeter, where the blaring notice on the house-wall shouted to me, 'Prepare to meet thy God', and on and on and on.

Once, in a remote lane, I saw a black-clad figure before me, a woman, and as I was not sure of my way I stopped and asked her. She was going that way and so I gave her a lift to the next village. As soon as she opened her mouth I knew, what I had suspected from my first sight of her, that she was not from those parts.

'You're a London girl,' I said, 'aren't you?'

'Yes,' she said, 'I'm an evacuee. I've bin down 'ere three



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months, with my little gel. I'm going to meet my 'usband. I ain't seen 'im for three months. It'll be like an 'oneymoon.'

'Good for you,' I said, 'how do you like it, here?'

'Oh, don't talk abart it,' she said, her face falling, 'I 'ave to stay 'ere, because of my little gel. I wish I was back in London, bombs or no bombs. These people 'ere! One day they're all right, next day they're all left. Still, I'm looking forward to seeing my 'usband.'

So I set her down in the next village, and, a lonely black figure in the empty English countryside, she wandered off to the station to meet her husband.

I drove on and on, thinking of other rides and of my Little Wonder, which had died so valiantly and sadly on the road to Budapest. A little mongrel varmint of a car, but what times I had had with it!

Now I had — or had at that time, later I had to lay it up, for at its present price, even if there were petrol, motoring is not worth its cost in England — a big car, a lovely blue arrow of a thing, that I had obtained cheaply, though it looked like a million pounds, and I fairly unzipped England when I travelled in it. But, looking back along the road I had travelled that Christmas Eve, I knew that it would never give me the happiness my Little Wonder had given me.

At last, just as the dusk was deepening, I came, cold and weary, to Dullmouth, and was glad to find friendly and welcoming smiles, to feel the warmth of human companionship creeping back into my veins.

It was nearly dark when I reached the top of the lonely hill and came to the little white house. I sounded the horn and immediately there was a commotion of voices and running feet, and the door opened, and the children, laughing and shouting, rushed out and clambered all over me and threw themselves round my neck.

I had not seen them for some time, those slum children. Now, for minutes at a stretch, I could not take my eyes from them. They were lovely, they were transformed, vibrant with health and life and laughter.

## PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Through the open door I could see the warm glow of the house. The little dog came scampering out, frantic with pleasure to see me. The children took me by the hands and dragged me in.

What an achievement, to have filled that house with so much life. The moment you crossed the threshold, you were in another world. I went in and saluted the lady who had done it all.

It is no easy thing, to come to a strange land, to the remote depths of a lonely countryside, your heart heavy as lead for your homeland, and to live, with a war in progress and an invasion at your threshold, and to keep your head high and never to lose courage and to compel, by your work, the respect of people whose tongue is difficult for you, to take children, sick in body and mind, from the poorest streets and turn them into affectionate and alert and gay human beings.

This was your blow for England.

I was scared, myself, the day you chose those children. I thought you were taking on too much. But you, who knew so much better than the people you came among the dangers that hung over England, that England was the last hope of us all, that with England we should all live or die, you fretted and repined that you could not do something for the cause, and how glad you were, that day, when you saw this opportunity.

And what magnificent use you made of it. You spent your strength and your time and your money, without stint, on them, and how you were repaid. I knew, far better than you could suspect, what a task you had undertaken; these children from the London slums, bitterness and suspicion born into their hearts, are other than the children from the mean streets of Vienna or Prague.

But how you triumphed. Later you took another child. You sewed for them and cooked for them and bathed them and nursed them when they were sick and told them stories and played with them and danced with them and were strict with them when they needed it. You proved that they were not weeds, but flowers, and they blossomed like opening buds in your hands.

You had no help whatever in that house, you cleaned it from

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floor to roof yourself, and cut and made your own clothes, and tended the garden, too, and on top of all that you wrote a book, and in addition to all that you looked like something out of *Vogue* on those rare days when you went out.

And if the Germans had come you would have faced them with that same calm courage, too, and I believe you would have forced even their respect. You taught those children to treat the sirens with cool unconcern, taught them what to do if ever real danger came.

I give it up. I have a good deal of energy, and like to undertake the difficult and overcome it, but what you achieved leaves me without adequate words. You had some reward — the love of those children and the esteem of good, simple people who, though they said nothing, noticed what you had done and tried, by kindness, to express what they felt.

That made me proud of England, again, when I saw it, and more than proud of you. You never lost faith in England, and restored mine when it wavered — and the mortal danger was very near, sometimes. You always loved England, though you could not understand it; you came to understand it and explain it to me, an Englishman. I never knew anybody who could impart courage as you imparted it.

I swear that no single man or woman dealt a braver blow for England than you, alone, during those long months.

When I came into the house a great Christmas Tree was ablaze with candles, and gifts for the children, and theirs for you and me, lay about, and from the kitchen came the smell of one of your few chickens, which you had killed for the homecomer. The whole house was filled with the laughter of those children.

How a house lives when children are in it. They had written, without coaching, the most charming letters, to you and to me. When I read them I could scarcely believe, again, that these were the same children. You had indeed won their hearts. They watched your every look and want, ran to make coffee for you, to fetch anything you needed. They were happiest if they could help you a little with your work. They stood under the Christmas

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Tree and sang 'Still and holy night' — that loveliest of hymns. You had taught them. When the snow came, a few days later, they built their snowman outside the kitchen window — so that you might see it.

As I watched them I felt that the hopes and ideals with which once, years before, I had begun to write a book, called *Insanity Fair*, had in some strange way, when they seemed futile and dead, come true here in this tiny house.

For this was England, as I thought England should be. This was England as I knew England could be. This was Christmas Eve.

Homage to the brave!

## CHAPTER 7

### LONDON'S BURNING!

By chance, after a random visit to Bournemouth, which satisfied me that villadom still stands where it stood, I came through London on the last Sunday of the old year, 1940, and never did I bury an old year with such glee as that one; if I could I would have watered its grave, though not with tears, as some one once said. With it I buried, as I hoped, the twenty-one years that began on November 11th, 1918, and ended, with the resumption of the war, on September 3rd, 1939. 1941, for the first time for very many of those years, brought hope again.

Nothing is so misleading as symbolism, or I should be tempted to try and see a symbol in the destruction by fire of a large part of London City on December 29th, 1940, the last Sunday of that bad old year. A symbol of the destruction of dithering inertia and squalor, of the clearance of their debris to make room for energy and cleanliness.

I tried to work, that night in London, for I had to be on my way again next morning and wanted to waste no time, when my ear told me that the night was rather noisier than of wont, and I put out the light, pulled aside the curtain from my window over London, and looked out.

To the east a great red glow grew into the sky. They must have hit an oil-tank, I thought at first. I watched for half an hour or more, expecting to see the glow dwindle and fade, as the flames were mastered. But it grew bigger and bigger. My window was several miles distant, at the least, I knew, yet I could have read a paper by the glow. The dark streets and the buildings were all illuminated. This must be an exceptionally big fire, I thought, wondering, and at length my journalist's itch left me no more rest and I went out in search of it.

'In the city' people told me vaguely, when I asked where the

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fire was, and I made my way, at first by tube to Piccadilly, and then afoot along the Strand and Fleet Street to Ludgate Circus. While I was going there the all-clear sounded, and this, at any rate, was a great stroke of luck that night. Normally, when they had succeeded in starting a big fire, the Germans returned again and again, to drop high explosive bombs on the brightly-lit target and on the unfortunate firemen, struggling with the flames. Seemingly a sudden change for the worse in the weather over their landing-grounds caused them, that night, to break off the attack in the late evening, so that the firemen, who could do little against the blaze, were at least spared the bombs.

It was a fantastic sight. Numbers of people were in the streets. Ludgate Hill, with the railway bridge running across it, shone bright as day in the glare and the dome of St. Paul's stood out gigantic against the red sky, with flames licking at it from all sides. Here, as office-boy and clerk and journalist, I had spent many of my days and nights, before and after the first Great War, but I had never thought to see a second Fire of London there.

Walking up Ludgate Hill, that night, I thought that half London would be destroyed. There was no mastering this blaze. I could not get very far for the heat. Behind St. Paul's the whole city seemed to be ablaze. Perspiring and half-desperate firemen, with begrimed and sweaty faces, directed toylike streams of water on to the enormous furnace.

I looked down side streets where the corner buildings were still intact, so that they looked like door posts with red doors. Silhouetted against the flames I could see the tiny figures of firemen on precarious water towers, squirting vainly into the holocaust. It was impossible to imagine what Cheapside and Moorgate Street must look like. Innumerable fire engines stood about, with miles of hose trailing snake-like here and there. The streets were slimy with water. Clouds of smoke and sparks drifted about. You could hear the crush and crumble of falling walls and timbers.

I watched and watched. This, again, was the thing that had filled my nightmares for so long, and now I saw it.

Another Fire of London! I thought of the other fire, nearly

## DECLINE TO FALL

three hundred years before. This one, I thought that night, looked like to be even greater and worse. When London burned the first time, in 1666, we had been ourselves to blame, though then, too, we were at war — with France. The King of France, for whom it was a great boon, nevertheless prohibited rejoicings because 'it was such a deplorable accident involving injury to so many unhappy people' and even offered to send food and all else needed for relief. 1666 and all that!

War seemed to have been an occupation for gentlemen then! I tried to imagine Hitler or his Propaganda Ministry, the inventors of 'coventration', forbidding German jubilation, or offering succour. It was impossible to think of anything more ludicrous. How far we had progressed, since 1666, towards a Christian civilization!

The second Great Fire of London, though in the event it proved less than that of 1666, contained a grave warning and lesson, and a great promise and hope.

The warning I realized a day or two later, when it became known that, because work had ceased in the City for the week-end, the roof-spotters had been absent. Because the businesses ceased to function and the workers went home, the buildings were not watched! The first months of air-bombing had shown that fire bombs, if seen and reported as soon as they fell, were easily put out; they were only dangerous if, falling unnoticed, they gained a firm hold before the firemen came.

But the English week-end was still sacred, at the end of December 1940. From Saturday midday to Monday morning no business was done there — and so everybody went away. Hitler, inevitably, was as perfectly informed of that as he had been of the state of affairs in Norway. So he fired the City on a Sunday evening.

I hope that that state-of-mind, which had so much to do with the coming-about of this war, was at last killed and buried on December 29th, 1940, for if it still prevails, at any point of our defences, we may yet lose the war through it. If we still leave some back-door or side-entrance open, because we never closed them

## LONDON'S BURNING!

before, Hitler will come through that gap. If we still need to experience every disaster before we take measures to avert it, we may be lost — because defeat would be final, you could not lure back that moving finger. I only hope the corpse of that fantastic, leave-to-morrow-to-look-after-itself frame of mind, is interred with all the other evil things of 1940 and the preceding years.

The great promise and hope that the second Fire of London brought were that, on these ruins, a better London would arise. Hitler — and it was long clear to foresee that this was one of the good things that might come of all this evil — destroyed much that we had better have destroyed ourselves, and would have destroyed but for the passive philosophy of 'stick it'. This holds good equally of the slum districts which he has ravaged and of much of the City of London which he destroyed.

We had that chance once before, to build a London worthy of its citizens, worthy to be the greatest city in the world, worthy to be the capital of the greatest Empire in the world.

We did not use it. The reasons are buried so deep in the years that they are now difficult to disinter and clearly to identify.

Some say that Sir Christopher Wren had a splendid and comprehensive and far-seeing plan, favoured by the Stuart King, which would have left London, even to-day, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, if only he had been allowed to execute it. But he was not so allowed, say these people; he was prevented by selfish individual property-owners, who cared nothing for the whole city or the whole community, but only wanted to grab back their little bit and build something on it as quickly as they could, so that of all Wren's great Plan only a few fine buildings and churches came to be built, here and there, and these were submerged and lost when London as a whole arose again from its ashes, as confused and chaotic and congested as before.

Wren's own grandson is the stoutest of the exponents of this version. Of Sir Christopher's plan, he says that 'The Practicability of this whole scheme, without Loss to any Man, or Infringement of any Property was at that time demonstrated, and all material



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Objections fully weigh'd and answered'. It came to nothing, he says, 'because of the obstinate Averseness of a great Part of the Citizens to alter their old Properties, and to recede from building their houses again on their old Ground & Foundations; as also the Distrust in many & Unwillingness to give up their Properties, tho' for a Time only, into the Hands of publick Trustees, or Commissioners, till they might be dispens'd to them again, with more Advantage to themselves, than otherwise was possible to be effected'.

That is a strong indictment, which seems inherently probable to-day to those who know the incorrigible opposition that has long hindered all organized effort for the cleansing of the British slums and the beautifying of the cities. Other students of the Great Fire of 1666 dispute these facts, and think a legend has grown up around Sir Christopher Wren's plan.

What is beyond dispute is that, after the present war, we shall have a better opportunity than King Charles and Wren had to rebuild, not only part of London, but much of England, and that we should learn the lesson of that great chance missed in 1666.

For London of 1940 was *not* beautiful. The affection of people for a place they see every day of their lives might lead them to see beauty even in a slum or a dungheap, they may find a jumble of coloured night-signs advertising gin and port more beautiful than the Place de la Concorde, but that is the result of unenlightenment, of miseducation, of malnutrition of the mind.

Everything in me rose up in protest when I heard an anonymous voice, accompanying some news-reel pictures of the Great Fire of 1940, vow vengeance for the destruction of 'our beautiful London'. Vengeance, yes, with all my heart. But 'beauty', no.

I *knew* these narrow and squalid and congested and tortuous streets, with their tumbledown and dirty buildings. They were *not* beautiful, and should never have been built like that.

If they were beautiful, then Silvertown is as beautiful as its name, which bears as much relevance to the district as St. James's Street does to sainthood. They were ugly to look at, sordid and depressing to work in. They were good neither for the mind nor

## LONDON'S BURNING!

the body. They gave no feeling that they were history-in-stone, even.

They were just black and dismal alleyways, built, brick by brick, and house by house, without any regard for their neighbours or for the appearance of the whole or for the paramount interest of the community. The only rule that governed their erection was that each man should be able to derive as much profit from his little bit of ground as he could. An overriding street-plan or building-plan, which would have turned this quite comprehensible and creditable motive to the general good of London, seems never to have existed. Only here and there, cluttered up and lost, flowers among the mass of weeds, was a beautiful building or a lovely church by Wren, to show what London might have been.

When I visited the City of London again, some ten days later, great gaps existed in that older chaos. Unfortunately, in one sense, the damage was sporadic. Large lumps of the older chaos still existed, in the middle of the new chaos. The remains of the new ruins were being dynamited, to clear them quite, but the long-standing older ruins seemed likely to remain standing and probably to hinder the building of a new, a really planned and a beautiful City. Always, when I thought of such things, I had the memory of the inert, let-it-slide, each-man-for-himself mentality which clouded England in the between-war years, 1918-1939. Would it be the same again next time? The rebuilding of London City, I thought, would be one of the many tests of that.

## CHAPTER 8

### WINDOW OVER LONDON

*February, 1941*

I AM finishing this book where I began it, months ago, at a window over London.

The window is still unbroken, the room behind still whole. From that window I have seen the bombs bursting and the searchlights vainly groping, the shells exploding overhead, and London burning. London still stands, and shows far fewer scars than any man might have feared, at the time I began this book.

The long, almost interminable nights are gone; the shorter ones, and the longer days are coming. Spring and summer lie ahead. Life and vigour are bustling back to the city, the theatres are reopening, and soon will be playing into the evening hours; soon the restaurants, which have long been deserted after mid-day, will be filling with people coming for dinner. The future holds hope again. 1940, the abhorrent year, is dead. 1941, the decisive year, lies before us. What will it bring?

The first of these three books, *Insanity Fair*, was an urgent, and the second, *Disgrace Abounding*, a clamant warning that we were drifting into war, and were unready for it. In the second book I made the gloomy jest that the title of the third might have to be 'The Decline and Fall of The British Empire'. That meant that the third book would never have been written. The third book has been written. I have called it 'The Decline To Fall of The British Empire'.

That says all that need be said. If by any chance I am wrong, it will never appear or it will promptly be proved wrong by events.

I feel, inside me, that the amended title is right. But I should hate above all things to contribute to any encouragement of the lethargic habit which still, after all the shocks, clings to and

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hampers and hinders this nation, like barnacles a ship, for these books were born in the desire to dislodge that apathy.

Remember those London roof-spotters, absent for the weekend, and the German airmen who chose that very moment to fall upon London!

For this reason, I want to recall the strange history of these three books. The first was written with one eye on the clock, in the hope that it could appear before the war began; a fortnight before it appeared the war *did* begin, although no shots then were fired. I mean, that Hitler invaded Austria and that, though we then did not take up the gauntlet, was already the war.

In shorter words, that book appeared, for all my hurrying, a fortnight after his first invasion.

The second book was written even more quickly, with an even more anxious eye on the clock, in the hope that it could appear, and would awaken people, before the war began. Not two weeks, this time, but two days before its appearance, the war began; that is to say, although no shots then were fired, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia and, although we then did not take up the gauntlet, that was already the war.

That book appeared, for all my hurrying, two days after his second invasion.

I do not know when this book will appear — I suppose about March of 1941. I *do* know that he must invade or try to invade this country, if he still means to strive for victory, nay, if he hopes to avert total defeat, in this war. I wonder, as I write it, whether he will make the attempt before or after this book appears. I hope I may be in time for once.

Let me be clear. I, personally, do not fear this invasion now, because we have had ample time to prepare for it. A great general, asked what defensive task he would chose from all the world, would surely need to reply, 'The Defence of Britain!' To defend this island should be a strategist's and a soldier's, a sailor's and an airman's dream. We have now had eighteen months to prepare.

We *should*, now, be in a position where we should long for

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nothing so much as that invasion, because we ought now to be able easily to defeat it, and its defeat would mean the early end of the war, in our favour.

I say we *should* be in that position. I do not know whether we *are* — for I do not know the whole truth about our defences or our preparedness, and I cannot forget those absent roof-spotters of London. They are much too symbolic of all the faults that brought us to our present pass.

But I am quite certain that if the invasion now comes, after all the time we have had to prepare, and if we do not hurl it back, we do not deserve to survive. At that point the arguments against us would become unanswerable. We should have no further excuse.

Thus the prophet, if that is the part I have had thrust upon me, has nothing further to say, after this. I am glad to have written these three books and am glad to have come to the end of them, for I do not like myself as a prophet, which I never was, but only a keen journalist, and come to feel like a club bore, who continually tells the same story. If the *Decline And Fall* has become a *Decline To Fall*, I have no further need to bore myself or others by wagging my monitory finger again; the downhill road is ended and the uphill road begins again, and I can write the other things I want to write. If, in spite of all reprieves, it is yet to be a *Decline And Fall*, I shall not be writing anything more, anyway.

But I still have this one last word to say — beware of the invasion!

It *must* come, unless Hitler means to throw in his hand. Upon its success or failure depends the title of this book; judging by all the facts as far as I know them, I have made my choice.

But it must come. If it does not, Hitler becomes incomprehensible. Only one thing can avert it — if he has one of his attacks of nervous despondency, such as he had after the failure of his rising of 1923, after his electoral setback of 1932, after his rebuff by Hindenburg in 1932. On those occasions he wept and talked of shooting himself. He will do this again, one day, if he feels him-

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self cornered — I do not mean that he will shoot himself, I doubt that, but he will talk of shooting himself.

But he is not yet so far. He once told a confidant that he was prepared, when the great day came, to sacrifice the lives 'of two million Germans'. Hardly any have been killed yet. If they had, he might, wandering between Despond Slough and Mount Hysteria, be on the verge of one of those nervous crises. But they have not. He should be about to deliver the mighty blow he began to prepare eight years ago, to make his supreme bid for triumph on the colossal scale. He cannot achieve Victory in the Balkans or Africa, though he may there find victories; he cannot now rest on his laurels; *he must invade this island and win or he is beaten; there is no middle way.*

So I think that the hardest year in our history is before us — I mean, the hardest year from the point of view of physical ordeal, not in spiritual suffering, because we now have hope, at least, and strength, and leadership, and as long as we have those all else is trivial.

But I distrust the terrifying habit of my fellow-countrymen of forgetting yesterday's lessons. In this winter of 1940-41 they have seemed likely to forget the lesson of the winter of 1939-40. Lulled by their leaders, they then seemed, day by day, to be forgetting the war more and more. If they only forgot it enough, people imagined, it would win itself. But all that winter Hitler was preparing, night and day, and when he was ready, in the spring of 1940, he struck with terrible might and efficiency.

All this winter of 1940-41 he has been similarly preparing. In the summer of 1940 he was losing scores, and sometimes hundreds of aeroplanes, every day. Since then, during the night-bombing period, he has hardly lost any — but he has been building more than ever. What does he mean to do with them? He is prepared 'to sacrifice the lives of two million Germans'! His losses in the conquest of the greater part of Europe have been trifling. He must now be stronger, in the air, on land, probably even at sea, than at any time since the war began.

So that Hitler must try to invade us — or passively await defeat.

## DECLINE TO FALL

He can only *win* now if, through lethargy, or whatnot, we give him the victory. Victory, if we use our chances, is already ours — and not in 1943 or 1944, but in 1942, if we exert ourselves.

I put the greatest faith in our Air Force. The spearhead of any thrust that Hitler makes must be the German Air Force and we have one that should be able to blunt and break it. Fortunately for us, the cloying custom of seniority and old-established practice has not yet had time to creep into and clog our Air Force. It is young, and led by young men. If it had been thirty years older the dry rot of our system might already have eaten into it — who knows?

Indeed, it may yet prove that the decisive battle of this war *was* fought in September 1940. I only dislike that theory because I dislike everything that may encourage relapse into lethargy in this island; because, however many decisive victories we score, the war is not won until it *is* won; because anything is dangerous that may divert this country's attention from the terrific blow that *must* be aimed against it in 1941, unless Hitler decides, like an old soldier, not to die, but simply to fade away.

And because of all this, I greatly distrust all the talk we have heard, since the air-raids began, about 'England can take it'.

This has given an exaggerated idea of the ordeal we have been through, which was grim enough, but may be insignificant in comparison with that which awaits us.

Few people realized the importance of Mr. Churchill's statement, in January 1941, that in this war, up to that time, only 60,000 British lives had been lost, and more than half of these were civilians. That is to say, some 30,000 civilians have been killed. As many as that were killed in Rotterdam in *half-an-hour*, by German bombs!

If the 'we can take it' talk, therefore, has subconsciously led people to think they have been through the worst, it may have done them a great disservice. Far worse impends — unless Hitler suddenly falters, dithers, becomes confused and despondent, and why should he, yet?

The only foe who could still destroy us is, not Hitler, but

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complacency, lethargy and unalertness. That is why I have mentioned those London roof-spotters and the town hall that was destroyed because nobody had thought to have sand placed in readiness. We *can* 'take it', or, in English, we can endure, but we have not yet had overmuch to endure.

The last chapter of *Decline To Fall* thus having been written in advance, subject to confirmation by events, I repeat that we are in a position to win this war by 1942, at the latest, if we use our chances.

By the middle of that year, if we are alert and endure now, we shall have at least equality with both Axis Powers in the air, and superiority to Germany alone if Mussolini's airmen are by that time no longer in the game.

But the Germans will not then be able to 'take it'. If they have not by then successfully invaded us, their state of mind will be one of pre-defeatism. Their hearts will be heavy with the memory of 1918, when, after a diet of unbroken victories that was served up to them for three and a half years, they were suddenly told they were beaten. Read what a famous German general said about his own countrymen in this respect, comparing them with the French civilian population, who, incidentally, had to endure more in 1914-18 than we have yet had to endure in this war:

I should like to think that our civil population could learn a lesson from the French people how to endure suffering for their fatherland. For I am convinced that the German people would never have stood the annihilation of towns and villages for four years as the French have stood it. The hysterical outcry of our people, at the invasion by the Russians of East Prussia, which compelled our General Headquarters to dispatch immediately an Army Corps thither and thereby lost us the war, is a case in point.

General von der Goltz refers to the very brief Russian incursion into East Prussia in 1914, which caused troops to be sent there who might have pushed the German offensive in France to a victorious conclusion and forced the Allies to sue for peace. He means, therefore, that the war lost in 1918 was actually lost in



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1914, through the inability of the German civilian population to 'take it'. There is truth in what he says. One of the greatest causes of this war is that the Germans for so long have not known the miseries they have repeatedly inflicted on others; again and again they have devastated, conquered and enslaved other countries, but never known the horrors of war within their own walls.

The real strength which the British people have shown is the strength to endure, not bombardment, which has not been intolerable, but disappointments. The disappointments which the British people endured in the first year of the war were, indeed, almost intolerable, and the fact that they endured them has led me to call this book *Decline To Fall*. The Germans would not have endured this strangling blockade of the spirit, any more than they will endure heavy air-bombing.

We may never need to use the air predominance which we must have. People who mourn the impossibility of 'regaining a foothold in Europe', and of 'driving the Germans out', forget many things. They forget that if we had not delivered our final attack on the Germans in 1918, they would still have collapsed in 1919 — because they were in no state to fight further. They forget the lessons of Hitler's exploit in Norway, where his five per cent of friends in the population helped to open the doors to him. They forget how much greater are the opportunities open to us.

They do not know that air-bombing, in our hands, is a much more powerful weapon than air-bombing in German hands. It is a great pity that most of our bombs, as yet, have fallen on the territory of our friends — French, Belgian and Dutch — on the 'invasion ports', and not on Germany. That should be altered at the first possible moment.

Hitler has but two courses open to him — for I assume that a sham peace, which seemed a deadly danger under our former rulers, is now out of the question.

He must attack us with all his strength, by aeroplane, submarine and by land, from Ireland also if he can get there, and win quickly, or accept immediate defeat. Or he must go off at a tangent into Bulgaria and Turkey and Syria and attack us from

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there in Africa, but that, no matter how successful he might be, *is only a secondary threat to us, not a mortal one.*

The questions of victory or defeat, life or death, can *only* be answered through the invasion of this island or failure to invade this island.

Meanwhile, the improvement in our chances has been greater than I hoped for, in my most optimistic moments, until November 1940. It will be a fantastic thing if the first blow for victory in this war proves to have been struck by the Greeks. I only hope it will help to make the people of this country, after this war, turn more attention to the Balkan peoples, who have long been forgotten and overlooked because they are, individually, weak in numbers, and because, having but recently shaken off alien domination, they were backward in water closets and the other mechanical devices which we are accustomed to regard as the synonyms of civilization.

When I was last in Greece, at the restoration of the present Greek King George, in 1935, I would not have tipped the Greek Army, then ill-equipped and riven by the long-standing Royalist-Republican feud, as the likeliest in Europe to rout a great military power. I remember that King George, fresh from Brown's Hotel, London, told me that his first and foremost care would be given to the reform of the Greek Army, and that I found on all hands great respect for the military ability of his Dictator-Premier, General Metaxas, who told me how he had advised General Kitchener to try another method of forcing the Dardanelles than that which we, unsuccessfully, followed.

These two between them most certainly worked a miracle. It is unfortunate that, in the rush of events, we have learned little about the details of that magnificent campaign, by which, for the first time, one of the two predatory dictators was driven half way out of territory which he had filched on some spectacular but cheap week-end swoop. The portents seem to be that the Greeks may drive the Italians clean out of Albania — if Hitler does not come to the succour of his ally. The Greeks proved that the predatory martial dictatorships have feet of clay.

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The result of that, again, may be that Italy will before long be knocked clean through the ropes of this war. This is well within the limits of possibility. We should never forget the impetus the Greek achievement gave. When it came the people of Britain, dogged though they were, were sick for a success — some success, no matter how little. They almost retched at the words 'evacuation' and 'withdrawal'. About the time the Greeks began to drive the Italians before them, a Ministry of Information representative had even been talking of a British withdrawal from Egypt!

I believe the instinct of Britain at that time was better and stronger than the instinct of those in the van. As at the long-deferred retirement of Mr. Chamberlain, the feeling of the land thumped and battered from below against the upper crust.

The greater public in this country clearly saw that this unexpected Greek success over a powerful foe was the moment to hit that foe hard somewhere else. What, we had had to yield British Somaliland to him, and yet the Greeks could knock him groggy, and we might even yield Egypt to him? Rubbish!

This feeling and demand for action grew clamant in the country and the Press, and, at long last, we struck.

The history of our campaign in Egypt and Libya, the brunt of it borne by Australian troops, is not finished as I write, but as far as it has gone it must represent one of the classic successes of all military history. We needed a success, badly! Here it was, and what a success.

For the first time for heaven knows how many years we did something efficiently, thoroughly, without a hitch, at the right moment. Here was a masterly operation superlatively well carried out and crowned with success beyond all expectation. At last.

On top of that we have the superb interplay of statesmanship between Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt. Here, at last, is leadership. The change in the spirit of Britain and in the feeling of America in the last few months is almost beyond belief, if a man look back to those fear-fraught days of May and June

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1940, when we were left alone, all unready, and America's only wish was to keep out of the trouble.

Americans tell me now that their country will soon be in the war. I do not permit myself an opinion about it, for it is their affair, and I think we can win, anyway, given their support in the other things we need. But I know they are more likely to come in if they see that we are winning than if they doubt that. Japan may give the last jolt to their indecision.

Inspiring months these have been, since I began, at my window over London, to write this book. They have seen the rebirth of hope.

In spite of, rather than because of ourselves, we are, at the last, on the right side after all. Freemen and men who want to be free, all over the world, are with us.

It is uplifting, to me, to see men I have known in their own countries, now under the German hobnail, here in this, my own country, wearing either their own uniforms or our uniform with the names of their countries sewn on their shoulders — Poles, Czechs, Hollanders, Norwegians, Frenchmen. It is inspiring to see those upstanding men from our own Dominions, to meet a man in British uniform in a dining-car and, because he is friendlier and more open than my own countrymen, to inquire who he is and find that he is a grandson of that great American soldier, General Grant. It is reassuring and exhilarating again to see American pilots, wearing British Air Force uniform with their own eagle upon it, and to think back to the Lafayette Squadron of yore, in France, in those days when men believed in their ideals.

At last we have found ourselves, and, finding ourselves, have found good company. From my window over London I see visions of Brussels, free again, of Warsaw, free again, of Prague, free again, of Vienna — ah, Vienna?

I hope to heaven Vienna has not been forgotten. Poor Austria, poor Vienna, the Cinderellas of this war. They *must* be free again, free at least to be ruled by Austrians, real Austrians, not by some truculent, shaven-headed *Gauleiter* sent down from Berlin. I

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think even this war, won, would be meaningless if Austria were not given a future.

Great changes, since I sat down at this window over London, to write this book. I well remember the day I started. Clouds and mist shrouded the very window, a bomber flew overhead, the night before had been ghastly. The Edgware Road, that same morning, had made me heavy with apprehension for the future.

I did not think, then, of calling this book *Decline To Fall*. I had begun to hope again, but not to hope as much as that. I still doubted whether I should even be able to publish the third book.

But the clouds outside the window have cleared a good deal. I look out of the window with zest, now, and see through it the dawning future, no longer the despondent past. I believe we shall yet have the chance to take up the torch we failed to hold high when it was thrown to us, from 'failing hands', in 1918, the hands of those, of whom we sang so long, whom we professed to honour, who died but who would not sleep if we broke faith with them. . . .

We broke faith; or rather, we did not, but the old men, who with savage selfishness clung to power and now say that this is 'a war of youth against youth', broke faith. The years from 1918 to 1939 must have made them, those million dead, not only stir from sleep, but turn in their graves beneath the poppies in Flanders Fields, those graves over which the mechanized legions of the same tyrant presently crashed and rumbled.

Now, young men have given us another chance to make good. Through their courage, the British Empire, as I believe, has declined to fall.

But —

The first of these three books was written at a window over Vienna, and an invasion followed. The second was written at a window over Prague, and an invasion followed.

The third and last has been written at a window over London. Its title is *Decline To Fall*.

This is no more a prophecy than were the forecasts I made in the first two books. They were exact political estimates, very

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closely worked out. It was clear and positive, to the trained assessor, that certain things would happen — unless we did other things to prevent them from happening. These things were Hitler's successive invasions, the German-Russian reconciliation, and the war. We did not do the things necessary to prevent them, and they happened. We are now in a position to decline to fall; it is still up to us.

It is now equally clear that the last move in this game of chess must come — unless Hitler suddenly turns inside out, becomes a different man. A negro *might* suddenly turn white; not the most expert assessor could budget for that. If Hitler does not strike, all the better; then the war is over bar the killing, and we might even be able to avoid that. That would mean that Hitler had lost his nerve at the last moment.

But the logic of events, the lesson of the game, the word which the moving finger is already shaping itself to write is that Hitler must and will strike, with all his force, which is enormous, at this island, the one obstacle that still thwarts him from complete victory, from such a triumph as history has never known. The world has not seen such a disaster as that would be. Flatulent balderdash, to say that 'war settles nothing'. This is one of the straws at which muddle-minded people clutch, who fear exertion more than all else. War settled the fate of the Greeks, the Bulgars, the Serbs, the Rumanians, for five hundred years — and that is a long-term settlement. War settled the misery of the Poles and Czechs for centuries.

To lose this war would settle us. Of course, we might emerge again in five hundred or a thousand years — is that sufficient solace for those who think that 'war settles nothing', simply because we once let the chance slip through our fingers of settling everything, after the world war we won?

If we lose this war it will settle a great deal, in the German favour. The peoples they have already conquered and enslaved are but trivial pawns in the game, to the Germans. Their present lot is bliss and comfort compared with that which the Germans would do to us. Only people who have long lived with and felt

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and shuddered at that extraordinary, half-sexual, long-frustrated impulse of the Germans to fling themselves upon this country and tear it to pieces, to erase and exterminate it, can know what awaits us, if the Germans win. Unfortunately, this is a thing that no words of tongue or pen can convey. It has to be seen and experienced and known and felt. I wish I could sear what I know into the minds of men in this country with a white-hot iron, so that there would not be the smallest vestige of doubt left there, so that I could with complete certainty call this book, the *Decline To Fall*.

We need, this coming year, to have eyes in the back of our head and ears all over us. We need to be alert from dawn to dusk, and twice as alert from dusk to dawn. We need our utmost watchfulness, our last strength. We need, every one of us, to be ready to die — even those who tell us so often ‘what we are fighting for’. It is lamentable that the official voice should still invite us, when the invasion comes, to retreat and crawl and cower into dug-outs and shelters and cellars, and ‘leave the job to the troops’. Every man in the country should be at arms.

Our greatest ordeal and suffering impend. If they do not come, how happy I shall be to have been wrong. But by all the signs we may, in this year 1941, have to withstand two terrible foes — an attempted invasion, and a lesser or a greater measure of hunger.

I know we *can* win. I think we *shall* win. So this book ends with the title that I found when I had written three-parts of it — *Decline To Fall*.

Outside my window over London a seagull serenely swings, wheels, breasts invisible waves, rides unseen surf. The same that was there, in October 1940, when I began to write? Perhaps.

Then it seemed a bird of ill omen. Now it looks, to me, like the dove returning to the ark.

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I HAVE in this book foreseen — in the assumption that we do not through lethargy or sloth give Hitler back the ace of trumps and make possible the success of an invasion — that the British Empire has declined to fall.

That means that we shall, at enormous cost, win this war, decisively. I think we *can* achieve that by 1942. How quickly, or how slowly, we win, will depend on the way we use our chances, and that is a thing this writer cannot foresee, and a thing any man would be chary in forejudging with optimism, because of past experiences.

To what end shall we win? So that we may have peace for a long time, and so that the domestic conditions of this country may be improved. In other words, peace abroad, so that we may work at home. This is the only reasonable answer to the question.

But the same answer was the only reasonable one that could have been given to the same question twenty-five years ago. Yet, although we won decisively then, we have not had peace and the domestic conditions of this country are, if anything, worse than they then were. But if that is to happen again, life has no meaning or pattern.

What were the causes of that fiasco in the years between the two wars? Why were they, and the fruits of victory, squandered and frittered away? If the reasons are understood, a repetition of that degenerate quarter-century may be avoided. If they are not, the same process will begin again after this war.

I think, and I saw the coming of this war from all angles, that the greatest single reason for it was the obsession with class in this country.

All politics in this country, because of the horrifying and mesmerizing effect which a revolution in distant Russia had upon the



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more-proprietyed groups, came to be regarded as a contest for power and a battle-of-wits between the party representing the more-moneyed group and the party representing the less-moneyed group, a struggle which the Tory Party always won because it was more astute and more inventive in devices to hypnotize the electorate. The party-on-top, obsessed with the desire to remain on top at home, forgot that peace abroad was of paramount importance to its own cause, and repeatedly followed courses, in foreign affairs, which were bound to lead to war; (but only war could bring the threat to its own especial interests which it so dearly longed to avoid).

This led it to look with a kindly eye on the doings abroad of men whom it thought to be after its own heart in their domestic policies; it could not believe that these men, in their foreign policies, would, if strengthened and flattered, presently turn upon England, and that England would then have either to capitulate or overthrow those very men, who would then be succeeded by other men of the kind they disliked.

Thus we had the fantastic spectacle of British statesmen, who were later to call on their countrymen to go out and fight 'the forces of evil', flattering and adulating these same evil men for years and years, even in one case (Mussolini) until long after the war had begun, and rebuking those who, from fear for their country, cried that this was senile madness.

This was the confusion of ideas and motives which, above all other things, led to the war of 1939. The same stupid obsession with class distinctions, the panic fear that Jack should ever come to think himself as good as his master, was responsible alike for the Gadarene foreign policy of England, in those years, and for the degeneration of the English domestic scene, in the countryside and in the cities.

If it continues after this war, we shall not have peace, for foreign policy — which is, the adjustment of our relations with foreign countries in such a way that we have peace — cannot be pursued by men who are trying to look all-ways-at-once.

Peace must be the paramount and only aim, if peace is to be

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had — and the paradox is, if only these people could realize it, that peace is their own best friend, that a war brought about through a sneaking liking for Hitler's methods ('After all, he saved Germany from Bolshevism, by gad!') is their worst enemy, and that the things they fear can only come upon them through and in war.

So, if we want peace after this war, there will be only two ways to have it, as there were only two ways before this war, both of which we missed.

The first, and better, is to be so strong in arms yourself that your strongest potential enemy will not attack you, because he fears defeat. The second, if you are not so strong in arms, is to ally yourself firmly with others in whose company, collectively, you will be so strong that he will not dare to attack you. The second method is only feasible if you have the firm resolve to fulfil it, to resist any peacebreaker, at any point, immediately he strikes. We should have done that in 1936, when Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland. His troops then had orders to withdraw if they met opposition. The opposition, in theory, was there; it had been pre-concerted, but was not used, because no firm resolve lay behind it. The results were the subsequent and successive annexations of Hitler and Mussolini, which became bigger and more audacious until we had to fight or capitulate ourselves.

The dangerous thing about the *foreign* policy we then pursued was that *domestic* policy was so clearly mixed up in it, that the vision of our rulers was so potently clouded by irrelevant Red-spots-in-the-vision.

You *cannot* mix foreign and domestic policy. If you do, you run straight into a war. If you keep your eyes resolutely fixed on the paramount aim of foreign policy, *peace*, you can have peace.

Our rulers always professed their longing to make of Hitler a man of sweet reasonableness by bringing him to the conference table, where Germany's 'just grievances' could be mended 'without the use of force'. They must know, or should know, that by a firm alliance with France and Russia, the thing they always avoided like the pest, they could have brought him to a conference

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table and avoided this war. As they did not, *he* made the pact with Russia, and we had the war.

He had said in *Mein Kampf* that Germany had lost the 1914-18 war through fighting on two-fronts-at-once, and that she must never do that again; but our rulers, hypnotized by the passages attacking Bolshevism, overlooked that vital passage. Here was the Red-spot-in-the-vision, the irrelevant outside factor, which made their foreign policy into nonsense. Yet Communism, in *peace*, could never have threatened them. In *war*, it may; you never know; at any rate, they never felt the need to suppress the *Daily Worker* in peacetime.

I have tried to show how this class-against-class mania in England, if you let it seep through into your foreign policy, may lead you to war, how the fear of a man in Whitehall for a man in Whitechapel, if the man in Whitehall is stupid enough to let it prey on his mind, may in the long run bring millions of men into armed conflict.

After this war, then, if we are not to repeat the fiasco of 1918-39, we can only have peace if we are ourselves strong enough in arms to enforce it, or if we find allies strong enough, in company with us, to enforce it.

I do not like the second method. It leaves the loophole open through which this war crept — the irresolution of one or the other party to the alliance in the moment of crisis. And we are strong enough, alone, to enforce the peace, if we remain strong. We should play the policeman's part.

For this reason, I hope that people in this country, when we have won this war, will not again be duped, or delude themselves, into thinking that peace can be preserved by phrases. The phrase last time was 'the League of Nations'. This time one or two phrases are flying around: 'Federal Union' and 'the union of the English-speaking peoples'. Many people seem to think that such a phrase, if they clutch at it, will keep the peace for them, without exertion on their parts.

This is an illusion. The League of Nations could have been made into a perfectly workable instrument if we had had the

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strength in arms and the strength of will to enforce its authority. But if we have that strength and that resolution we do not need the League of Nations, we do not need any of the other phrases. We can have them, yes, if we like, if it flatters us in any way, but they are not necessary. If we are strong enough and resolute enough, *we* can enforce the peace.

That conclusion is inescapable, but England is still full of minds which would do almost anything to escape it. From an obsession with phrases, they cannot bear to face realities. How many times have I been told with uplifted hands and shocked eyebrows, when I stated the case like this, 'Oh, but that would mean A New Armaments Race'!

War is the greatest and craziest armaments race, the armaments race that should be avoided. These people seemingly do not object to that kind of armaments race, every twenty-five years, if they can, in the more or less peaceful intervals, flatter their own notions of Christianity with such unctuous phrases as 'No Armaments Race'.

There will be no armaments race if, after this war, we maintain the very long lead in armaments which we then shall have. Then, perhaps, we shall be told that the cost is prohibitive, another variant of the same empty but holy-sounding phrase.

And the cost of war? This war was *born* in such sanctimonious and mendacious phrases. The Tory election of 1935 was won by them: 'I give you my word that there will be no great armaments!' And to-day? Are there 'no great armaments'? Would not 25,000 British aeroplanes, then, have been better than that which we now have?

Of all the frauds, this phrase about 'no armaments race' is the greatest — and I have no armament shares, but I have to pay income tax and would sooner pay 3s. in the £ than 8s. or 10s. I am talking of peace and how to keep it when we have won it.

If we have and keep that long lead, after this war, and make plain our resolve to use it against any new peacebreaker, there will be no armaments race and no war.

Another holy-sounding phrase to beware of is 'No entangle-

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ments in Europe'. This phrase is, if possible, an even greater fraud than the other. I hope none imagine to-day that we are fighting this war because we gave a guarantee to Poland, or that we entered the last war because we had given a guarantee to Belgium. We are fighting because the passive surrender of either of those countries, on either occasion, would have brought the next assault upon ourselves, and we should have had to face it unready and alone. We are fighting for our lives.

If we maintain our armed strength after this war, and if our will is firm, we can enforce peace in Europe and I can say, with more certainty than I ever said anything, that every nation in Europe would welcome this. None of them, save the Germans, like war. The instinct of obedience, even of the Germans, would welcome us in a police function. I speak for Bulgars, Greeks, Poles, Czechs, Rumanians, Hollanders, Danes, and many more. Ask them, reader, yourself, if you have the opportunity.

It would be cheaper for us, better for us, better for them, better for the world. We owe it to the position we have taken in the world. I say taken — for that position was not given to us, we took it. Well, then, having taken it, we should accept the full responsibilities of it.

We should win, make, maintain an enforced peace. We can do it, and we do not even need Federal Union or any other phrase to do it, although there is no reason why a few such phrases should not be tagged on to the tail of our kite, if it pleases anyone. We are strong enough to do it alone. But any man who thinks that we can 'keep out of Europe' is courting a third stroke — and I believe a man may survive two strokes, but the third is usually fatal.

Indeed, I believe that only class feeling in this country prevented these clear things from being clearly seen in the between-war years. We dithered into war, from muddled-thinking, from the sympathy that our ruling class, still privily bothered about that receding Red Revolution in Russia, automatically felt for any pocket-filling politician abroad who claimed, for their especial delusion, to be out for the destruction of The Reds!

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It is an appalling thing, this class system in England, it is an enemy greater than Hitler. In the old days, when Sir Halibert de Blueblood led John Pitchfork into battle in war and benevolently squired over him in peace, it had life and meaning. For Lord Pickles, Lord Toothpaste, Lord Cheapsuit, Sir Portly Bankroll, the Hon. Verdant Greengroce and Colonel de Benture to ape the feudal and aristocratic regime to-day, when all the life has drained out of it, to insist savagely that all power in the country must be kept in the hands of a few people whose parents had money enough to send them to a small group of exclusive schools, that any man who has been to those schools is a better man than he who has not, is grotesque but very dangerous.

We are, again, in the middle of a war, in which poor and simple and humble folk are proving their worth. Once again, like ghosts rising from their graves, the phrases are being resurrected that raised such high hopes in the last war.

A Labour Leader, Mr. Attlee, announces that he 'does not think that after this war we shall be able to afford an idle rich class, and equally, we shall not be able to afford to have those who are willing and able to work denied the opportunity; unemployment must go'. (Incidentally, I never yet met an Englishman who very much wanted to make the idle rich hard-working paupers; the other thing, opportunity for men of goodwill, is what so many people want.) Another Labour Leader, Mr. Bevin, has a war aim — 'to end all poverty'. A third, Mr. Greenwood, says that 'Britain, after the war, will not tolerate in her midst the tragic spectacle of abject poverty, nor the existence of that problem of industry which in the past has not been solved — the scourge of unemployment . . . It will, I believe, be the pride of the nation to succour its citizens who, during the war or afterwards, fall on evil days, through bereavement, disability, disease or old age . . . We shall look forward to developing our educational system and social services . . . We are planning to get rid of ugliness in our towns, to build a fairer Britain, and to replace the hovels that remain by worthy homes.'

Fair words, as fair as those which were uttered between 1914

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and 1918, and after that war Englishmen in millions idled in unemployment, rotted in the derelict coalfields and shipbuilding towns, new slums were built on the edge of the towns and the old ones were hardly dented.

Such promises can only be fulfilled if they are accepted on all sides, but on the Tory side there is no sign of any sympathy for these ideals. The old class-against-class clamour continues, bitter as gall, in the midst of that war in which we have found 'a new unity', in which we are 'all in the front line'.

The moneyed classes dislike the 'evacuees', the children from the slums, and often will not have them. Deans and brigadiers fume about the 'raising of vain hopes' of social betterment and greater opportunity. A colonel, in charge of officers-to-be, writes to *The Times*: 'The middle, lower-middle and working classes are now receiving the King's commission. These classes, unlike the old aristocratic and feudal (almost) classes who led the Old Army, have never had "their people" to consider. They have never had occasion to think of anyone but themselves . . . They have very largely fallen down on their job . . . Man management is not a subject which can be taught; it is an attitude of mind, and with the old school tie men this was instinctive and part of the philosophy of life . . . Never was the old school tie and the best that it stands for more justified than it is to-day.'

In the midst of a second world-war, with England fighting for her life! In the midst of another war 'for democracy', against 'the forces of evil', for 'freedom'.

England was ruled, between 1918 and 1939, almost exclusively by men who had been to two or three schools. The system enabled them to keep power continually in their own hands, to pass it to and fro like a box of sweets, to help their own friends into jobs, to keep all out of their little inner circle who were not entitled to enter it by the piece of striped ribbon they wore round their necks, by relationship, by related interest.

Never was such a fiasco as the history of England in those years. Never was the old school tie and the worst it stood for so appalling

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ingly condemned as it was then. Never was such ignorance and irresolution and insincerity shown in the conduct of public affairs. Never was less progress made in the domestic betterment of England. Never was the country allowed to drift so miserably into war. Never was the public told so many untruths. Never were millions of men so badly managed.

I should find it very hard to say to which 'class' I belong in England unless, as I believe, the distinctions between the classes are formed by the amount of income, in which case I belong to a different class every year. But I have known and mixed with men of all 'classes', spoken with kings and roomed with paupers, lunched with peers and lodged with clerks, I have had colleagues who had been to a public school and university and others who, like myself, had had little schooling, I have been unemployed and poor and have held high positions in my calling.

And as the result of all this I know that there is no greater fraud than this of the old school tie, of the class of men particularly fitted to occupy all the high posts, to govern or misgovern the country, because they have been to one of three or four schools.

I know that there are good and bad, able and inefficient, in all groups, or classes. But I know that this old-school-tie system is poison ivy on the oak of England — because it reserves the high places to moneyed men, with or without ability, and keeps out of them the unmoneyed man, with ability.

Thus this system is the deadliest enemy of patriotism, which means love of country, of the whole community, not of a small, exclusive group enabled, by the possession of money, to monopolize those few exclusive schools and thereafter all the seats of power.

The old school tie bears more blame for the dreary advent of this war than any other single thing, because it kept all the keys of power in the hands of men unfitted to hold them. Not merit, but money, gave them those keys.

For the government of the country, the conduct of its policies, is also 'man management', and history can show few examples



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of man mismanagement more horrid than that of the years 1918-39 in England.

The old-school-tie system has the Somme, Passchendaele and Dunkirk among its battle honours, or dishonours, and it also produced those 'Mayfair Men', criminals of the most unprincipled kind, who infested the social scene of London in those between-war years. When its virtues are extolled in such immoderate terms, that needs also to be said.

The appalling thing about this system, which is the most implacable foe of patriotic thought in England, is its strength.

To-day it stands discredited to the bare bones. The results of its folly are plain to see. Its representatives rose, by way of one disaster after another, from knighthood to baronetcy and earldom. When they died, they received, to the familiar chorus of 'a lifetime spent in the service of his country', 'a man really sensitive, mankind-loving and warm-hearted beneath a frigid exterior', and 'though he failed, his motives were of the highest', the obligatory burial in Westminster Abbey.

Under this system, a man can do no wrong. The system does not allow him to. Each stair he treads is labelled 'Mistake'; but he cannot fall down stairs, only up.

Thus, with a unique record of incapacity and blunder, the old-school-tie system stands to-day.

The war has come: so the cry goes up, 'Only old-school-tie men can manage the army'.

The peace will come: the cry will rise, 'Only old-school-tie men can manage the country'.

In spite of that grotesque record of ineptitude, the Tory system stands almost undented. It will not or cannot change; it will not open its ranks, it will not throw off the limpets, its glassy eye is still fixed on the old school tie.

Hardly any of the men who followed, applauding, on the path that Mr. Chamberlain set have stepped down. They are nearly all there, still. One goes to an Embassy in Madrid, another to an Embassy in Washington, a third to the Woolsack. As they go the Tory press remarks approvingly, how well they deserve of their

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country, how far-sighted they were and are, how the Spaniards or Americans or whatnots will love them. Soon they will return and start passing-the-sweets again.

If this goes on, there is another disaster ahead, even though we survive this war.

This Tory system is responsible for the decay of the countryside and the growth of the slums and derelict areas, for the 'gargoyle' faces of which C. E. Montague wrote, those products of malnutrition of the body and mind. During this war I frequently passed through a south coast town where some thousands of young men, of 'the middle, lower middle and working classes', were in training as cadets of the Royal Air Force. It was amazing to see the change in looks, physique and bearing which exercise of the mind and body, and a sense of opportunity, gave these young men. Many people must have noticed the same thing. The bodies filled out and straightened; the eyes cleared, the chins became firm, keenness and vigour animated the faces.

That is but one picture in little of what could be done in England. Is all that to be lost, again, when this war is over, is all vigour again to be strangled by the old school tie? Can such men only be given opportunity in wartime? Are they, like their fathers, to fret and degenerate in unemployment or in unworthy tasks after the war — because they have no old school tie?

The Tory system, through this miserable doctrine of the little exclusive coterie united by money and the piece of coloured ribbon, is responsible for the social evils of this country and the long foreseeable wars that find it unready.

For this reason I, for one, deeply regretted that Mr. Winston Churchill, who as an 'unreliable man' of 'poor judgment' had suffered so much from this very system, to the misfortune of England, took over, when Mr. Chamberlain laid it down, the leadership of that Tory Party which, in an election speech at Dundee in 1908, he described, according to the newspaper report, in these terms:

We know what to expect when they return to power — a party of great vested interests, banded together in a formidable

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confederation; corruption at home, aggression to cover it abroad, the tyranny of tariff jugglery, the tyranny of a well-fed party machine . . . dear food for the million, cheap labour for the millionaire. That is the policy which the Tory Party offers you.

Writing about a year before the war began, in the second of these three books, I said that a new government, led for instance by 'Winston Churchill, Eden, Duff Cooper', would not be enough to save England, because, although these men saw the light in foreign policy, they belonged to the same class (I have to use this repulsive word) as those other men who were leading us to disaster, and would not be able to get outside their skins.

But in England to-day we do need governments above party — and not in the sense of the Tory tiger with a few Labour leaders, first on its back and then in its stomach. We need governments of men who do not see the country as a railway train, with first, second and third class coaches, but as a community of Britons.

This is indeed our most urgent need, for we may survive this war and yet die of our political system, which has brought about an England that mocks the poems about 'this sceptre'd isle', the songs about 'land of hope and glory', and the coloured advertisements of 'This England'.

The Tory system, has been the main cause of this decay and decadence. Two other chief causes are the listlessness and lifelessness of the political Opposition to the Tory system, and the fawning complacency of the Churches. Public enlightenment might have come from either, or both, and with it enough pressure on the ruling Tory system for the follies of our foreign policy and the scandals of our domestic scene to have been mended.

From neither of these sources came either clear guidance or vigour. What did an Englishman, disgusted with the mess that the Tory system had made of the English towns and countryside and fearful for the penalties that its foreign flounderings would bring down upon the land, what did such an Englishman see who turned his eyes towards the Labour Party? A party whose foremost leaders had delighted to desert it when the Tory system,

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feeling a little uneasy about its future, delighted to honour them. A party many of whose older, and really 'working-class' representatives, have deteriorated into trades union bureaucrats. They are as submissive to the rule of the Trades Union Congress as the most childish Tory Member to the Party whip. They, too, stand for a 'class', not for England.

But what 'class' is it they stand for? The working class? I doubt it; this party for long periods seemed to forget the slums, the derelict areas, the idle towns, malnutrition, and the decay of the countryside as completely as the party across the House. The 'class' they stand for seems to be, first and foremost, the trade union class — which is not England, but just another group of vested interests, like the Tory Party across the way.

This party was never more bitterly condemned, out of its own mouth, than by its behaviour during the dark days of Dunkirk, the summer months of 1940, and the winter months of the air bombardment. In those times the poorest people of England, whose plight is supposed to be their especial concern and care, suffered more than ever before. And in those days this Party, as the debates in Parliament show, thought more of the foreign Jews than of their own people, of the derelict areas. This party has now succeeded in opening every door in England to the newcomers — while great suffering, during and after the war, awaits the native working classes of the country.

But the picture of the now large foreign Jewish community in this country is not one of distress, like that of the native working class. The representatives of British 'labour' should visit the expensive hotels and restaurants of London, the deep-down ones, on any black-out evening.

The other quarter from which hope, guidance, and a call to action should have come was the Church, or the Churches. They gave none of these, and the decline of religious belief in England accompanied the decline of faith in the politicians.

The Church of England, in those between-war years, was but the complacent Sunday-continuation-school of the Tory Party. If it could, it would have canonized Mr. Chamberlain. Both

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churches were the fierce guardians of 'morality' — in the sense that Peeping Tom might have understood morality. A boy and girl cuddling behind the bushes in a public park, a public house serving drinks at thirty seconds past the hour when it should have ceased to serve drinks, a picture-theatre opening on Sunday afternoon — ah, how the Churches, those staunch Defenders of the Faith, flung themselves upon such things as these.

But in public and international affairs the Church knew no 'morality', could not distinguish between right and wrong. Some foremost leaders of both Churches (the Archbishop of York was a notable exception), who were later loudly to call on Christians to fight 'the forces of evil', just as loudly applauded what these same forces of evil did in Spain. The sufferings of poor people there meant nothing to them. The same archbishops and cardinals who, when the bombs fell on London, were to hope they would never live through another such night as the last, who were to withdraw to the country, perceived quite clearly that the general whom Hitler and Mussolini were aiding, with bombs and tanks and men, in another country, was a gallant Christian gentleman. They little cared what the forces of evil did to the fisherfolk of Almeria or the peasants of Guernica. Red Russia was 'a godless country'; Herr Adolf Hitler the Fuehrer, after all and by gad, only wished to Save Us From Bolshevism; Signor Mussolini the Duce 'threatened neither the religious freedom nor the security of other peoples'.

The Founder of the Church, if He had come to visit the Temples of 1933-39, might have asked what He was doing in that galley, where the high priests spent their days discussing the right of a woman 'living in adultery' to be called An Unmarried Wife, and finally decided, after much learned discourse, that she might, in their immaculate conception, be known as An Unmarried Dependant Living As A Wife.

Who will dispute this statement, made at the Archbishop of York's conference in January of 1941, by Miss Dorothy L. Sayers:

Suppose that during the last century the churches had devoted to sweetening intellectual corruption a quarter of the

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energy they spent in nosing out fornication, or denounced cheating with a quarter of the vehemence with which they denounced legalized adultery. But one was easy and the other was not. To upset legalized cheating the Church must tackle government in its very stronghold; while to cope with intellectual corruption she will have to affront all those who exploit it — the politicians, the Press and the more influential part of her own congregations. Therefore she will acquiesce in a definition of morality so one-sided that it has deformed the very meaning of the word by restricting it to sexual offences.

‘Tackle government in its very stronghold?’ ‘Affront the politicians, the Press and the more influential part of her own congregations?’ Give up the nosing-out of fornication? Abandon the pursuit of the Unmarried Dependant Living As A Wife? Relinquish those invigorating and Christian occupations? Denounce corruption in public life?

Out upon such atheistic and Godless preaching. Is it not better to be an ardent Churchman and Churchgoer than a Christian?

Thus the things which, in the years between 1918 and 1939, combined to further the decay of the English spirit, the English body, the English countryside, and the English towns, began with the coming of machine-made and mass-produced prosperity in the Victorian and Edwardian ages. Will the process now, after a second World War, be arrested, or will the story of slothful deterioration be resumed when it is finished?

Mr. Churchill will stand in history as one of our greatest leaders. He took the chair when the company was almost bankrupt. The change has been almost miraculous. Many of the other directors, from the bankruptcy period, are unfortunately still there.

He has been destined to save England, Britain, the Empire, from the new Napoleon. The civic state of England, however, after other great men defeated the other Napoleon, deteriorated, on balance, steadily until the present time.

That is neither reasonable nor right nor necessary. This country could be redeemed, by rulers as patriotic in peacetime

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as its fighting men are in war. Mr. Churchill, whose power and prestige after this war are likely to be more than any man's since the Duke of Wellington, could achieve a greater triumph even than the defeat of Hitler. He could reinvigorate England, rebuild those slums, reanimate those derelict areas, destroy the detestable system of class-segregation, open the gates of opportunity to those masses of Englishmen who, though they did not inherit money and were not prenatally entered for an old school tie, nevertheless are able and vigorous patriots.

He could not do those things if 'the tyranny of the well-fed Party machine', which he has now taken over, continues. The sort of concession to the heroes-back-from-war, to the national wish for a freer and better England, which the Tory system, as it worked in the years 1918 to 1939, would be likely contemptuously to offer, largesse-like, would at the most be a few hundred more free scholarships at those 'public' schools.

Mr. Churchill's life epitomizes the evils which the Tory system inflicts on England. He, whom an American lecture-tour agent advertised in 1900 as 'the future Prime Minister of Great Britain', was by old and jealous men kept from that office for forty years, until England faced mortal calamity.

In his youth he was by instinct and inherited feeling drawn to the party which claims to preserve England's heritage, but which, in the practice of the last century, has come more and more to conserve only that which is bad — influence, nepotism, money-snobbery, privilege, purchase, protection, the prerogatives of wealth. Mr. Churchill felt the strangling effects of this system and boldly attacked it; the enmity of old men, thus incurred, drove him from the Party he now leads again.

Those old men long decried his 'lack of judgment'. Lord Stanley began the cry, in 1901 ('I hope the time will come when Mr. Churchill's judgment will grow up to his ability'); in 1939 Mr. Chamberlain was still using it; and in between innumerable voices had uttered it. In 1904 Churchill was boycotted by the huge Tory majority to which he belonged, and by 1906, an ardent social crusader for educational and licensing reform, was an outcast

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from it. After its discomfiture he became a Liberal Minister, though he remained at heart a Conservative, like the bitterest critics of the Tory Party of to-day, the leadership of which he has assumed.

Mr. Churchill's story continued, at every stage, to be one of prescience, experience and energy discouraged and rebuffed. The elderly generals and admirals were as hostile as the elderly Tories. In 1911, as Home Secretary, he presented to the Committee of National Defence, a forecast, astoundingly accurate, of the course the 1914 war would take in its early stages; his memorandum was, inevitably, called 'silly' by General Sir Henry Wilson, representing the General Staff. When he became head of the Admiralty, an admiral, Lord Charles Beresford, bitterly attacked him. Three days before the 1914 war began Churchill, risking disgrace and dismissal, on his own responsibility mobilized the Navy; when the German attack came, the Fleet was ready.

That masterly stroke may have saved England. Other master-strokes, which might have curtailed the 1914-18 war by years, were spoiled by the obstruction and procrastination of short-sighted and jealous seniors. They were, the expedition to Antwerp, which in its ill-preparedness and tardiness strikingly resembled our tragic expedition to Norway in the present war, and the attempt to force the Dardanelles. Churchill, too, again on his own responsibility, had the first tanks built, a cleverer use of which, again, might greatly have curtailed the 1914-18 war. But when others spoilt his projects, he took the blame and was again driven into the political wilderness. His story in recent years is, again, one of prescient warnings scouted and derided.

The story of Mr. Churchill vividly illustrates the way the Tory system works to suppress enthusiasm, vitiate energy, obstruct talent and pillory patriotism. Soon, the opportunity will be Mr. Churchill's to win, in peace, a victory even more renowned than that with which destiny is about to crown him in war, to prevent the recurrence of the evils which, in the last fifty years, have hampered domestic reforms in England and twice allowed Britain to drift into war. For victory in this war is only half the battle; the



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other half is the reinvigoration of England. Mr. Churchill, who is leading the country to victory in war, has taken over the leadership of the party which offers the greatest single obstacle to victory in that second field.

The change, since he came, has been miraculous, if the word ever deserves to be used. I can hardly believe my own mind's eye, when in February of 1941 I look back to February of 1940, for at that time it seemed almost impossible that we should escape the reckoning for all our laziness and laggardliness and the imbecile wastage of our strength upon class-feuds, that destiny should once again prolong its bill.

The chief, the priceless, the glorious thing is that hope has been reborn, that the future is still ours, to make good the past.

How good it has been, at the end, after all those wretched years of foreboding, to live in this time, and to watch Britain and the British Empire decline to fall!

*Although this is not the usual place for a dedication I should like  
to dedicate this book to Dartmouth, with gratitude*





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